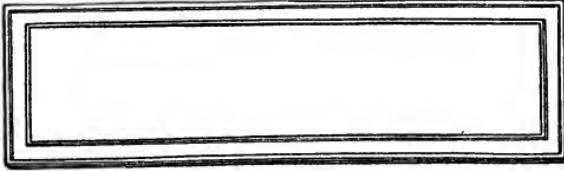
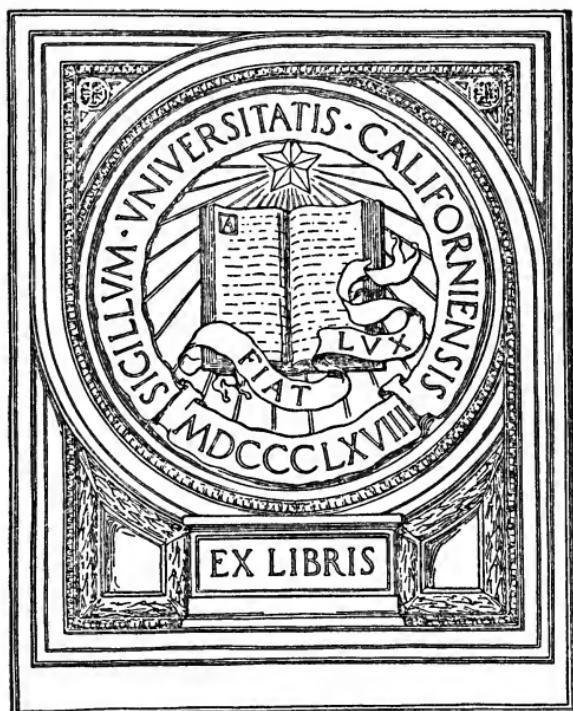


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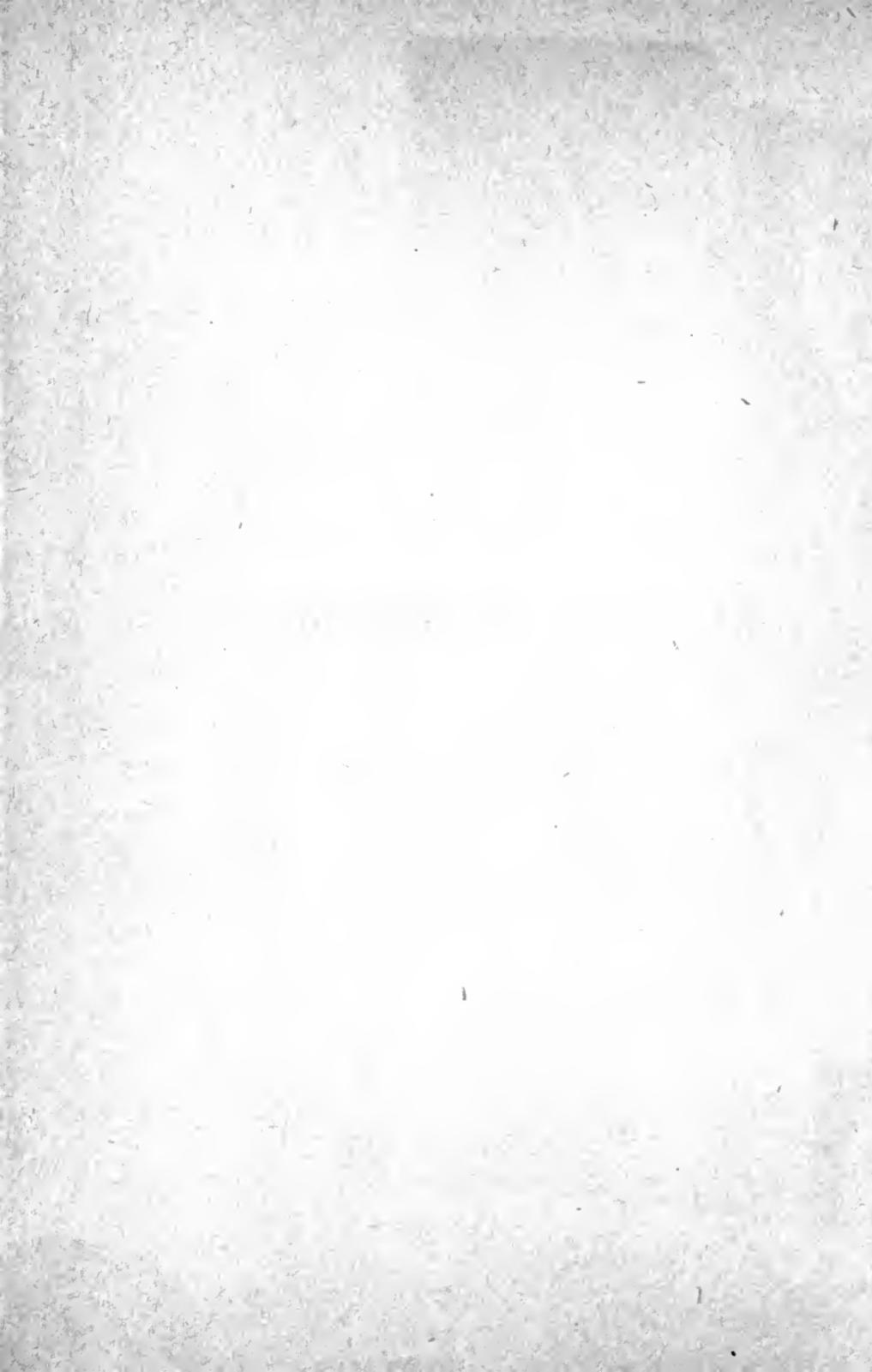




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# **THE STORY OF DUCIEHURST**



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# THE STORY OF DUCIEHURST

*A Tale of the Mississippi*

BY

CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK

AUTHOR OF "THE FAIR MISSISSIPPAN," "THE AMULET," "THE STORM  
CENTRE," "THE STORY OF OLD FORT LOUDON," "A SPECTRE  
OF POWER," "THE ORDEAL," "THE PROPHET OF  
THE GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS," ETC.

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## THE STORY OF DUCIEHURST

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# THE STORY OF DUCIEHURST

## CHAPTER I

DEAD low water and there the steamboat lay on the sand-bar, stranded and helpless. The surging swirls of the swift current raced impetuously on either side. Scarcely a furlong distant on that corrugated, rippling surface the leadsman had heaved the plummet of the sounding-line at "deep four." Nevertheless the craft had grounded here on a submerged projection of a "tow-head" built of silt and detritus by the ever shifting Mississippi, attaining dangerous proportions since the last run of the boat. All unknown and unsuspected it lurked till "quarter less twain" was sung out, but the next cry of the leadsman smote the air like the sound of doom. Before the engines could be reversed the steamer was in shoal water, ploughing into the sand with the full momentum of her speed, the shock of the impact shattering the equilibrium of all on board.

Straight ensued the contortions of mechanical energy common to such occasions; the steamboat repeatedly sought to back off from the sand; failing in this she went forward on one wheel and then on the other, finally on both, trying to force her way across the barrier to her progress, in technical phrase "to jump the bar."

At length the Captain confessedly relinquished

the attempt to effect the release of the craft under her own steam. The fires sank down in the furnaces; the water cooled in the boilers; and the passengers of the still and silent boat resigned themselves to await with such patience as they could muster the rescue which might be furnished by a passing packet, none due for twenty-four hours, or which a rise in the river might compass, for the clouds of the dull October afternoon were heavy and sullen and intimated the near probability of rain.

A group had begun to assemble on the promenade deck, disconsolately looking out at the rippling tawny expanse of the vast vacant river, for the bight of the bend was as lonely a spot as could be found throughout its course. On either side of the deep groove of the great channel the banks rose high, seeming precipitous at this shrunken stage of the water. In the background loomed gigantic forests with foliage sere or green as the nature of the growths might determine.

The leveling effect of the stereotyped surroundings of travel served to bring out in distinct relief the individual characteristics of the passengers. Mr. Floyd-Rosney received the Captain's final admission of defeat with the silence and surly dignity befitting an implacable affront, and his manner could scarcely have been justified had he and his family been wilfully abducted by orders of the owners of the packet line. In his wonted environment at his home, encompassed by all the insignia of wealth and station, he might have seemed a man of such preëminent importance and fashion as to render a contretemps impertinent and significant of a failure of respect and service, but here, on the deck of the steamer,

his sullen impatience of the common disaster, his frowning ungenial mien in receiving the apology of the Captain, poor victim of the underhand wiles of the great Mississippi, betokened an exacting ill-conditioned temperament, and suggested that his wife might be anything but a happy woman, even before she emerged from the saloon and he met her with a rebuke, which was the obvious vent of his general ill-humor that could not be visited on independent strangers.

"Too late,—*as usual!*" He turned and placed a chair for her with an air of graceful and considerate courtesy. "The fun is all over,—the Captain has given up the game."

The coercions of good society rendered it imperative that he should somewhat veil his displeasure, but the thin veneer of his graciousness was patently insincere and did not commend his pretense of regret for her sake that she should have missed the spectacle of the gyrations of the boat in seeking to free itself from the sand-bar, though, indeed, one might travel far and never witness the like.

He was singularly handsome, about thirty-five years of age, tall, well built, admirably groomed, fair and florid, with finely chiseled features, straight dark hair and large brown eyes, whose inherent luster was dulled by their haughty, disparaging gaze. He rated his fellow-men but lightly in the scale of being, and, save for the detention, he would not have appeared on deck or exchanged a word with the rest of the passengers in the tedious interval of making his landing.

"I am glad that you have at last consented to sit here awhile," he continued to his wife, with flimsy

solicitude. "That stuffy little state-room is enough to asphyxiate you."

His moods, indeed, were elements to be reckoned with and his wife was eager and smiling in making her excuses. "Oh, I should have come at once," she protested,—"only the baby was so reluctant to take his nap. I couldn't get away till he was asleep." She was nervously adjusting her wrap, appropriate and handsome, but evidently hastily flung on.

"I think he has a nurse," her husband remarked in surly sarcasm.

"Oh, yes, of course,—but he wanted me,—he would not let go my hand till he was fast asleep."

She was as much as ten years her husband's junior, of a blonde type very usual in American life. One might have thought to have seen her often, so familiar have become the straight, delicate somewhat angular lineaments, the fair hair, the gray or blue eyes, the slender, yet strong, elastic physique. The degree of beauty, of course, is dependent on the blending of these elements and its pleasing appeal. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney was one of the finer examples of the ordinary mold. Her features were classic in their regularity; her delicately kept, redundant blonde hair had a silken sheen that simulated burnished gold; her gray eyes were of a darkly greenish luster that suggested moss-agates, and they were shaded by long, pensive lashes almost black; the whole effect was heightened by her dark brown cloth gown with narrow bands of seal fur, the hat corresponding with the rich yet plain costume that betokened a traveling garb. She had a certain covertly derisive expression in her eyes, whenever diverted from her husband, for it must needs be a brave wife,

indeed, who could banter that imposing presence. To this look a trick of an occasional upward cant of the chin gave special emphasis. When she seemed amused one could not be sure whether she was laughing with her interlocutor, or at him. In fact, she had a marked gift of irony which she sometimes carried so far as to suggest the danger of recoil. Her old nurse, in the state-room, who had tended her infancy, as well as now her three-year-old boy, had often warned her in years agone, when the victim of her unhallowed mirth, "You surely will stump your toe some day,—better mind how you skip along." The discerning observer might well fancy she had duly met this check in her career in her choice of a husband, for the obvious repression in her manner toward him suggested a spirit-breaking process already well in hand. Her deprecatory disarming glance when their eyes met had in it an eager plea for approval which was almost derogatory, curiously at variance with her beauty, and position, and handsome garb, and her assured manner in deporting herself toward others.

"The best you can do for us, Captain Disnett?" she had caught the words of the skipper's apology as she issued. "Then all I can say is that bad is the best!"

She regarded the immense spread of the great river with disparaging objection. "How low it is, —in every sense of the word."

Despite her assured pose a certain consciousness informed her manner when her eyes suddenly fell upon a young man of thirty, perhaps, who was standing near the railing of the guards, apparently ruefully revolving the Captain's announcement that it

was impossible to get the *Cherokee Rose* off the sand-bar under her own steam. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's surprise, for she had started on perceiving him and flushed with embarrassment, was not reciprocal. He gave her no glance of recognition, although his eyes met hers in a casual regard as he turned from the rail and drew forth his cigar-case with the presumable intention of making himself as comfortable as the detention would permit. As yet the baleful sign, "Cotton aboard. No smoking on deck," had not been displayed, for the boat was on its downward beat and would not take on cotton until returning up the river. His muscles were suddenly stilled, however, and there was a moment of intent, though covert, observation of her, when her name was abruptly called out in blithe tones as a young girl emerged upon the deck.

"Oh, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney! I did not know you were on board. How perfectly delightful," with a swift cordial rush, both hands outstretched. "Captain Disnett," she whirled upon the skipper, in buoyant parenthesis, "I forgive you! You have merely contrived us an enchanting week-end house party. I don't know when or where I should have met Mrs. Floyd-Rosney otherwise. And Mr. Floyd-Rosney, too. Is little Ned here? Asleep?—Well, I'll spare his nap."

The deck, the whole dull day, seemed suddenly irradiated by the presence of the joyous young beauty. Naught but happiness surely came her way. Eternal springtide shone lustrous, soft, mellow in the depths of her great sapphire eyes with their long black lashes and thick white lids. Her hair was black and straight but her complexion was transparently

fair and an exquisitely delicate rose bloomed on her cheek. Her coral lips were slightly parted, for she was always exclamatory and breathless, and showed a glimpse of her even white teeth. She was tall and slender, very erect, and moved with the deft certainty of trained muscles, the athletic girl of the day. She wore a simple gown of rough gray cloth, and a knowing little gray toque. She had no disposition to await events and, after a brief comprehensive survey of the personnel of the group, she abruptly accosted the young man at the rail, an impassive spectator of her entrance on the scene.

"Why, Mr. Ducie," she exclaimed in blended surprise and affront, "aren't you going to speak to me?"

He started as if he had been shot. He had much ado to get his hat off his head with a cigar in one hand and a blazing match in the other. But this accomplished, through casting the match overboard, he came forward, replying with genial grace, albeit in some embarrassment: "I think my brother has the advantage of me. I am Mr. Ducie, all right, but my Christian name is Adrian. I fancy it must be Mr. Randal Ducie who has the honor of your acquaintance.

"Oh,—oh,—yes,—but this—" She was leaning on the back of one of the stiff arm-chairs and across it openly studying his lineaments. He had distinctive features; a thin, delicate, slightly aquiline nose, a firm well-rounded chin, bold, luminous hazel eyes, with a thick fringe of long straight lashes, a fair complexion not altogether devoid of the concomitant freckles here and there; fine teeth and mobile red lips; and his hair, glowing in the light, for he still held his hat in his hand, was of that rich

auburn shade that artists love and that one sees in paintings and seldom elsewhere. "But this—" she continued, "oh,—you are fooling us. Do you think I can forget you so soon when I waltzed ten miles with you last winter, if it were all strung out in a row! This is certainly Randal Ducie."

He had begun to laugh in enjoyment of her perplexity. "Randal Ducie is not half so good a man," he protested gaily.

"*Les absens ont toujours tort,*" Mrs. Floyd-Rosney brought herself, uninvited, into the conversation. Not altogether welcome was her interpolation, for the laugh faded from Mr. Ducie's face and he remembered to resume his hat and to slip his cigar-case into his pocket, as if in preparation to betake himself elsewhere. But if this were his intention it was forestalled by Miss Dean.

"Now, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney," she turned vivaciously to that lady, since she had of her own motion entered the discussion, "wouldn't anybody think this was Randal Ducie?"

"They are much alike, but I saw the difference in a moment," Mrs. Floyd-Rosney was smiling naturally, graciously, and looking extremely pretty, as her husband, leaning against one of the posts that supported the superstructure of the deck and, smoking with strong long-drawn puffs, watched her with fixed inscrutable eyes.

"Oh, you didn't," Miss Dean contradicted gaily. "You *couldn't!* The likeness is amazing! Oh, pshaw! it is no likeness. He is guying us. This *is* Randal Ducie."

"You are the twin brother of my young friend, Randal Ducie?" Colonel Kenwynton asked, smil-

ing, an old gentleman of the old school, with a courteous manner and a commanding presence. His tall figure still retained the muscular slenderness of his athletic youth and his stately martial carriage; his dense snowy hair, brushed forward to his brow and parted on the side, and also, straight down the back, the white imperial and long military mustachios gave him the look of a portrait of some by-gone celebrity rather than a man of to-day, so had the thought of this fashion perished. His age was frosty but kindly, and the young man responded with covert humor, as if elucidating a mystery.

"Oh, yes, we have always been twins," he declared.

"How *did* you know the difference, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney?" demanded Miss Dean.

"I knew it at once," she replied, still smiling, but the gravity in the eyes of her husband deepened momently as he gazed, silently, motionlessly at her. "I myself don't know the difference at all," said the subject of the discussion. "When I am with Ran I feel as if I were looking into a mirror."

"Oh, how quaint,—how enchanting it must be," cried Miss Dean extravagantly.

"And so convenient,—I have always made Ran try the new hair cuts first."

"Oh, I didn't mean any such preposterous thing as that—but to have another self so near, so dear, to duplicate one's lot in life, to understand and sympathize with every sentiment, to share one's mind, one's heart——"

"No,—no,—we draw the line there. I am a deep secret fellow! I could tolerate no twin of an inner consciousness to spy out my true soul." Ducie was

letting himself go in this badinage, and he had no meaning of a deeper intent than the surface of jest. "And I could undertake no such contract as to sympathize with Ran's extravagant enthusiasms and silly sentimentalities."

The attention of the group was focused on the speaker. None of them noticed the uprising conscious flare in the face of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney—except, indeed, her husband, who was quick, too, to recollect the significant fact that only she had had the keen discernment to detect the difference between this man and the twin brother of whom he seemed the counterpart.

"Oh, Mr. Ducie, how unkind!" cried Miss Dean.

"Yes, indeed," with affected obduracy, "Ran must sigh his sighs, and hope his hopes, and shed his tears all by himself. For my own part I don't deal in goods of that grade. But if ever he strikes on some nice little speculation, or discovers a gold mine, why I am his own only twin brother and I will come in with him on the ground floor."

"And, speaking of business," said Colonel Kenwynton, "how goes it in the south of France? "Your brother did not accompany you."

The group had taken chairs, and, with the permission of the ladies, Ducie had lighted his cigar. "No, Ran sticks to cotton through thick and thin. It is his creed that God never thought it worth while to create anything but the cotton plant, and the earth was evolved to grow and market it."

Mrs. Floyd-Rosney was struggling with the species of discomposure which is incompatible with reserve and silence. "You went into the wine trade in-

stead," she made the parenthetical statement from an imperfect memory.

Mr. Ducie had that air of averse distaste which one feels in hearing one's own affairs misrepresented. "Beg pardon," he said, "I quitted New Orleans some six years ago with old Mr. Chenault; he was a wine merchant there, a branch of a Bordeaux house,—knew my father and used to furnish my grandfather's cellar at Duciehurst in the long ago. He offered me an opening in the French house at Bordeaux, but I didn't take kindly to the trade, and as the Chenaults had connections with the silk manufacturing interests in Lyons they contrived to wedge me in with their relatives."

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had obviously lost her poise, "I remember now,—but I can't recall who was speaking of you and your success the other day,—to be a junior partner in the concern."

Adrian Ducie's consciousness of the breach of the commercial verities turned him stiff. "Oh no! I? —a junior partner? Why, never in the world!" he exclaimed brusquely. Then, realizing that there was no reason for heat, since the matter had no concern for those present, he went on more suavely. "I occupy a sort of confidential and privileged relation to the members of the firm, owing chiefly to the value of the Chenault interest, but I have neither the responsibility nor the profits of a junior partner."

As he ceased to speak he had a sudden look of affront—more than aught else it suggested the impulse of some spirited horse refusing a mandate of urgency, and ready to bolt, to rear, to assert an insurgent and untamed power. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's

words might bear an interpretation of an ill-judged patronage,—her facile foolish blandness in magnifying the importance of his opportunity that at its best must seem so very small to her. With an almost visible effort he brought himself under control without a snort of contempt or an impatient stamp. There was an interval of silence so awkward, in view of these forced disclosures of commercial status and financial interest, that Ducie was disposed to continue the personal relation as a less crude method of its conclusion than bolting precipitately from the subject. "We have close connections, of course, with importers in America as well as elsewhere. It is my mission to effect a settlement of a matter in controversy with a company having extensive dealings with us and I am glad to utilize the opportunity to run in on Ran at his plantation in this lower country while I am en route to New Orleans. It makes this detention all the more unfortunate. I lose time that I might otherwise spend with him."

"You must be awfully lonesome over on the other side without your twin brother, your other self," said Miss Dean, sweetly commiserative.

And, indeed, his face fell.

"But how lovely to be in France," sighed Mrs. Floyd-Rosney. "I envy you your Paris."

"Paris!" he could but fleer. "I see as much of Paris as if I were in the Mississippi swamp." Then, recovering himself, "Paris is not France, so far as the silk manufacturing interest is concerned."

An interruption was at hand and this seemed well. An old gentleman, dressed in black, a Prince Albert coat, a wide soft felt hat, with a white beard

and sightless eyes, seeming more aged and infirm than he really was, by reason of his groping progress between a stout stick and a pompous negro manservant, was steered down the guards and toward the group; perceiving whom, Colonel Kenwynton hastily arose and advanced.

"Here we are, Major," he exclaimed jovially, "and here we are likely to stay. (Make yourself scarce, Tobe," he added in parenthesis to the servant, "I'll look after the Major.") And Tobe relinquished his charge with a grateful bow, after the manner of the servitors of yore. Doubtless, he was glad of the leisure thus vouchsafed him to spend, after his own liking, but he showed no undue alacrity to avail himself of it. He did not disappear until he had placed chairs both for the Major and Colonel Kenwynton, glanced discerningly at the clouds to judge whether a possible outburst of the setting sun might render the spot selected undesirable, asked if he should not bring glasses of water, notified the Major that he had placed a light overcoat on a chair hard by, in case the veering of the wind should necessitate protection, and only then did the Major's faithful body-servant "make himself scarce."

It was seldom, indeed, that Major Lacey ventured so far from his home, in view of his increasing age, with which his infirmities waxed in proportion, except, indeed, on the various occasions of Confederate reunions, when his years fell from him, and the scales dropped from his eyes, and he was once more a dashing young officer with his sword in his hand and his heart in his cause. He was now returning from one of these symposia, and the old soldier would canvass its incidents, and discuss its personnel,

and repeat the toasts, and recount the old stories and live again in the days of yore, growing ever dimmer, till the next reunion would endow the past with reviviscence and it would glow anew and the dull present would sink out of sight. He was barely ensconced in his chair when Miss Dean gaily accosted him.

"Yes,—here we are, indeed, Major,—you remember me?—Miss Hildegarde Dean,—but you ought to have been on deck when we were trying to get away. It was just like an attempt to jump over a fence by pulling on the rosettes of your slippers,—wasn't it, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney?"

"Oh, she didn't witness it," said Floyd-Rosney hastily, reminded of his displeasure because of her tardiness. "Too late,—*as usual*. She closely resembles Athelstane the Unready. You remember the Saxon nobleman, Major Lacey."

His bland patronage was a bit more insufferable than his obvious disapproval, if such comparison be attempted, for the casual stranger had done naught to incur his unwelcome benignities, whereas his wife, by consenting to become his wife, had brought her doom upon her own head.

The receptivity of the object of his grace in this instance was blunted by misunderstanding. "Well, now," the Major replied, knitting his brows, "there was a foreign nobleman—a native of Saxony,—for a time on the staff of General Lancaster while I, too, was a member of his military family. This stranger was eager to see our artillery in action,—greatly interested in the Gatling gun,—it was new, then, invented by a gentleman from North Carolina. But I don't remember that the officer's name was

Athelstane,—my memory is not so good as it once was,—his name has escaped me. But he had been a lieutenant of the Line in his own country,—light artillery."

Colonel Kenwynton observed Floyd-Rosney's satiric smile and resented it. He would not suffer the matter to rest here. "Mr. Floyd-Rosney is alluding to a character in one of the *Waverley* novels, Major," he said tactfully.

"Eh? Oh, I remember, now,—I remember,—*Ivanhoe*,—Athelstane of Coningsburgh," the Major replied casually. "But I was thinking of that foreign nobleman from Saxony,—much impressed by the Gatling gun in action."

The war was all-in-all with the Major.

Miss Hildegarde Dean suddenly rose and, with her swinging athletic gait, walked across the deck and seated herself in a chair beside the Major. He was conscious, of course, of an approach and a new proximity, but whose presence it was and of what intent he could not divine. He turned his sightless face toward his unseen neighbor, expressive of a courteous abeyance, ready and reciprocal toward the advance were it charged with a meaning for him, yet with a dignity of reserve in awaiting it. He, of course, could not see Hildegarde smiling at him so brightly that one must needs deplore afresh his affliction which debarred him from such suffusive and gracious radiance.

"Major Lacey," she began blithely, "I have just lived for this moment. I want you to tell me exactly how your grandmother—now that is your great-niece Elodie Lacey's great, great stupendously great grandmother,—Elodie is a chum of mine and

a precious monkey-fied thing." (The Major's eyebrows were elevated doubtfully at this description of his young relative, but the tone was one of approval and affection and he took the compliment on trust.) "We have such gay old times together," in a burst of reminiscent enthusiasm. "But now about your grandmother's romance. How did she happen to marry the Revolutionary lieutenant and not the rich English baronet whom she sent away in despair. Elodie delights in telling the story,—all about the fox-chase and all—but she mixes things up so with a piece of the white brocade of the wedding dress that she treasures and the carved ivory fan and the white satin slippers and she owns the whole bertha too—it is Honiton,—lovely lace, but out of style now,—that one can't get at the details for the millinery. A rational account of the whole affair would be as sentimental and exciting as a novel. Take a turn with me up and down the guards, Major, and justify your grandmother's choice. I am as steady as a rock, and this ship is not going to pitch and toss among the breakers on this sand-bar,—eh, Captain Disnett?" with an arch smile over her shoulder.

The old man's stick was tremulously feeling the way as he arose. Then she passed her arm through his, and moved forward at a measured pace, with the other hand deftly putting out of the way chairs that might have otherwise blocked their progress. Colonel Kenwynton looked on with a benignant smile, for, presently, their slow and wavering march up and down, the old blind soldier, supported between the radiant young beauty and his stout cane, was interrupted by bursts of laughter, genuine and hearty, such as he had not enjoyed for many a day.

Then ensued deep and earnest narrative, entangled in such a whirl of questions as would imply that Miss Hildegarde Dean had never before heard of the great battle of Shiloh, and, indeed, save that she had once been of an excursion party that had visited the famous site, she would have scarcely remembered its name. But she was gifted with a keen and enduring observation, and ever and anon she broke into his detail of special incidents,—the fall of noted officers, the result of intrepid charges, the location of certain troops,—to describe the monuments that now marked the spot, their composition, their approximate measurements, their inscriptions, and her opinion of the general effect, with such gusto as to incite a revival of recollection and to recall an episode or two of that momentous event which had eluded till now his comprehensive memory.

"That is a lovely, lovely girl," said Colonel Kenwynton to Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, as he contemplated the incongruous cronies.

"Yes, indeed," she acceded with graceful alacrity, "but she should not trifle with the affections of the venerable Major."

"Perhaps the venerable Major is a bit of a flirt himself"; the flavor of Mr. Floyd-Rosney's pleasantry was acrid to the taste.

"Why, I should not call that 'flirting,' on her part," said the matter-of-fact captain of the steam-boat. "I have known her since she was that high," —he indicated with his right hand a minute stature,—"her uncle has a plantation down here a bit and she and her mother have often been passengers of the *Cherokee Rose*. She was always just of that kind, thoughtful disposition."

For the old Major was laughing on keys of mirth so long disused that they had fallen out of tune and accord with the dominant tones of his voice, as if in another moment he might burst into tears.

"Well, perhaps not exactly 'flirting,'—only a bit of her universal fascination system," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, with her chin in the air.

"I shouldn't think she pursues any sort of system,—she seems all spontaneity. She is incapable of calculation," said young Ducie.

Once more Mrs. Floyd-Rosney flushed unaccountably, but she said, lightly, "I perceive that you are profoundly versed in that most difficult science, the knowledge of human nature."

"You do me too much honor," he replied, looking not at her but at his cigar as he flipped off the ash. "It requires a very superficial observation to discern that she is as open and undesigning as the day."

"For my own part I think the day is particularly enigmatic," she retorted with her scathing little laugh, that yet was so sweetly keyed. "I think it has something in reserve, especially obnoxious for us."

"So it seems that you, too, are a profound observer, and that meteorological phenomena are your province," her husband ponderously adopted her method of persiflage. Then he added pointedly "I beg you to observe it was not I that initiated the personal tone of this talk."

He rose with his pervasive suggestion of a lordly ill-humor, which enabled one to realize how grievous it was to be alone with him and privileged to note the workings of his disaffected and censorious moods.

He strolled casually off, and began to talk at some little distance to one of the several passengers about the price of cotton and the disposition of the planters to hold it back from the market for a rise.

Mrs. Floyd-Rosney and Mr. Ducie were left seated near each other amidst a cluster of vacant chairs. With that peculiar clarity of the twilight air when there is no mist every detail of this limited world was visible with special distinctness, as if there were no insufficiency of light, but one looked through amber glasses;—the slate-tinted lowering sky, the ceaseless silent flow of the vast murky river, the high bank so far above the water at this low stage that the grassy levee, an elevation of prominent emphasis in so level a country, was far withdrawn and invisible from this point of view. There was on the bank a swamper's hut perched on tall grotesque supports to escape inundation in the rise of the river, which gave some idea of the height of the flood-level in times of high water. The red glow from the open door of the cabin pulsed like the fluctuating fires of an opal, and thus intimated that a mist was insidiously beginning to rise. There was no other token of life in the riparian borders,—no token on the broad spread of the river, save that a tiny craft, a dugout, was slowly making its way across the tortured currents,—seemingly an insignificant object, for who could imagine it was freighted with grim Fate? The moment was of peculiarly lonely intimations and she spoke abruptly.

“By your leave I shall make the conversation even more personal.” Then, with an intent gaze, “Where is your brother?—and what is he doing?”

Adrian Ducie flushed deeply, looking both af-

fronted and indignant. Then he replied in his wonted vein: "You do not know but that I am my brother,—you could not distinguish one of us from the other to save your life."

"Oh, yes, the difference is obvious to me," she exclaimed in agitated tones. "Besides, Randal would have spoken,—he would have greeted me. When you evidently did not recognize me I was sure that you were the one I had never seen."

"Doubtless, Randal would have rejoiced to offer you the compliments of the season." He could not altogether maintain his self-control and his voice had a tense note of satire.

She cast upon him a quick upbraiding glance. Then, as if with an afterthought: "I am aware that you must resent my course toward Randal."

"Oh, no,—not at all,—though it would scarcely be courteous to say that I congratulate him upon your inconstancy. But when a lady plays a man out within a fortnight of their anticipated marriage with no reason or provocation, his relatives can hardly be expected to lament his escape. Pardon my blunt phrase for its sincerity, since I am no artist in words, and this discussion has taken me by surprise."

She flushed hotly, feeling arraigned for having introduced the inappropriate subject. Yet she persisted: "Oh, you do not understand," she said in increasing agitation. "You haven't the temperament, I can see, to make subtle deductions."

"Well, if Randal has such a temperament as you seem disposed to credit him with,—or to discredit him with, if I may appraise the endowment,—I am happy to say, in reply to your kind inquiries, that his

subtlety has not affected his health or spirits. He is in fine fettle and as happy as he deserves to be. As to the rest, he is much absorbed in business,—in fact, he is in a fair way to make a fortune. He is of a speculative turn and has always been peculiarly lucky. Randal is something of a gambler."

"No, never," she interrupted hastily, "Randal was never a gambler."

He revolted at her tone of defense and arrogations of superior knowledge. He could not restrain a smile of sarcastic rebuke as he retorted: "Oh, of course I meant only in a commercial way. He is bold and takes chances that would deter many men. He has great initiative."

"We have been abroad so long that I had lost sight of him altogether," she said in embarrassment.

The subject was infinitely distasteful to him but its sensitive avoidance would seem a disparagement of his slighted brother. His fraternal affection nerved him to complete the response she had elicited.

"Randal has made a 'ten strike' several times, and has a long lease of some fine land that this year has produced a stunning crop of cotton. He has had a rare chance, too, to buy a standing crop, and, of course, he took it in. The planter had shot a man,—very unpopular affair,—and had to quit the country."

Even as he spoke he realized how meager were these scanty graces of opportunity in comparison with Floyd-Rosney's magnificent fortune, but he would not seem to recognize the fact. He would not minimize his brother's lot in life as too small for her consideration, since, with an avid curiosity and interest, she had sought information.

Mrs. Floyd-Rosney was silent for a moment. She had achieved a startling and florid success in her brilliant marriage, a girl of very limited means. But this temperate, conventional atmosphere, the opportunities of people of moderate resources and high lineage, was her native element, and somehow it exerted a recurrent fascination upon her at the moment, it had the charm of old associations forever relinquished. The joy of effort, of laborious acquisition, the splendor of superior capacity, of trying conclusions with Fate could never be hers to share, but she felt it was fine to ride at Fortune with lance in rest as in the jousts of some great tourney. She listened wistfully to the simple annals of agricultural ventures so familiar to her early experience, with the sentiment of gazing through barred gates,—she, to whom all the world was open.

“I am glad to know that Randal is well and happy,” she said at length. “You may think it strange that I should introduce this topic with you,—and you not even an acquaintance.”

She paused to give him space for a disclaimer, but he was rancorous on this theme,—he would not make it easy for her. “No, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney,” he said gravely, “nothing that you could do would seem strange to me.”

She was accustomed to deference, apart from the sullen tyranny of her husband, and this experience of conjugal life was only within the last five years. She scarcely knew how to dispense with the phrase, the smile, the bow, which, however little genuine, respectfully annotated and acquiesced in her discourse. Adrian Ducie’s blunt rebuke,—it did not affect her as courtesy, for it was too sincere—his

obvious hatred of her, not only of her course, his absolute lack of confidence or approval, the impossibility of winning him even to a modicum of neutrality baffled her. She was losing her composure, —the threads of her intention. Her eyes, looking at him wistfully, large and lustrous, despite the closing dusk, pleaded with him for help. When the sound of the dynamo began to pulse on the stillness, the electric lights flared out on the deck as well as in the saloon, and showed that those eyes were full of tears. He met their glance calmly with unconcern. He had not caused her grief. This evident attitude of mind flung her back on her pride, her own individuality. In the supreme crisis of her life she was arguing within herself, she had exerted her feminine prerogative of choice, and this in the manner that best suited her. He should not sit in judgment thus on the justice of her decisions, on her line of conduct, and she wondered at her meekness that had permitted him to take this position, that had made his standpoint possible. She sought to rally her self-control, and then she said, in her clear-cut enunciation:

“Thank you very much,—the idea occurred to me when I saw you this afternoon that I had here an opportunity which I have long sought.”

She glanced about among the shadows, bulkier, blacker, because of the keenness of the electric glare, as if she feared observation or interruption. The piano in the saloon was beginning to strum “Oh, rosy dreams!” with a disregard of accidentals calculated to give the nightmare to the fellow-passengers of the performer. The perfume of cigars floated down from the hurricane deck—Ducie’s was dead in his

hand. A dreary cow on the lower deck seemed to have just discovered that she was in process of shipment and was mournfully lowing for her calf a hundred miles or more up-stream. Deep guttural voices of roustabouts rose in jocose altercation for a moment from the depths of the boiler deck, and then all was silent again.

“I have long sought an opportunity to restore to Randal one of his gifts, overlooked at the time that I returned the others. I found it afterward, and was embarrassed,—shocked, in fact——” she paused abruptly.

“There was the registered mail, or the express, I suppose,” he suggested coolly.

“I wanted to explain.” She felt her face flame. “It was of intrinsic value other than sentimental.”

“——which was great,” he interpolated.

“And,” she sturdily held to her purpose, “I did not wish him to misinterpret my motive in keeping it.”

“You could not write to him?”

“Oh, no, I could not write to him.”

“I can easily understand that,” he sneered, full of vicarious rancor.

“It is a bauble in the shape of a key—it is set with a large diamond and a circle of rubies. It was understood between us as the key of his heart,” she could but falter at the revelation of the forlorn little sentimentalities, shallow of root and wilted in the sun of a sudden blaze of prosperity. “And I kept it,” she quavered.

“Randal would never think of the diamond and rubies,” he said, reaching, indeed, the limit. “You

have too many jewels, doubtless, for your motive to be misconstrued."

There was a moment of dead silence. "He could never have said that," she replied, in a voice that trembled with anger. "He is not in the least like you. I hate you for looking like him."

"Thank you for dispensing with ceremony and telling me this on so short an acquaintance. It is more than evident that you like neither of us overmuch. May I ask what are the commands you design to lay upon me, for if you have no more to say I should be glad to withdraw, with your kind permission."

"Only this,—that you will take this valuable which I chance to have with me and give it to him,—explaining that there was no sentimental motive in my retention of it, only the accident of overlooking it at a moment of great commotion."

He remembered that this event was the famous nuptials that filled the countryside with *éclat*, and the metropolitan newspapers with the names of the guests of distinction and the description of their jewels and gowns. To him, to whom the journals had been sent in France, and to his brother, this tawdry phase of display cheapened the marriage and lowered it, and that it was the splendid superstructure on the ruins of the heart of the jilted lover did not serve to further commend it.

"I wonder that you remembered to return any of the little trinkets," he remarked. "But, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, you must forgive me for declining to repair your negligence. I really cannot undertake your commission. The relations between my brother and me are peculiarly tender. All my life I can remem-

ber almost in every scene that other self, from the time when we were little toddlers in our red coats and toboggan caps."

He paused, for he saw, at the moment, almost with the distinctness of actuality, the swift little image of himself and its replica in childhood days, scuttling about among the vacant chairs of the deserted deck, snow-balling each other in juvenile joviality in some forgotten winter. He caught himself and went on. "My brother is dear to me and I to him, and I will not allow the shadow you cast to come between us."

"And you will do nothing in the matter?" Her voice was keen with its plaint of surprise and disappointment.

"Oh, you will easily find another emissary," he said, rising and standing with one hand on the back of his chair. "Permit me to suggest that you give the thing to Miss Dean. She, evidently, is very well acquainted with Randal. Tell her that it is the key to his heart, and, perhaps, she may unlock it."

And with that he lifted his hat and left her.

## CHAPTER II

IN all riparian estimation the grotesque plight of a craft stranded is more or less a catastrophe. Even in this sequestered nook spectators were not slow to mark, at a distance, the grounding of the *Cherokee Rose* in the afternoon and to discuss the magnitude and the management of the mishap.

The earliest of these were two men summoned from the swamper's shack situated in the "no man's land," thrown out between the levee and the high precipitous bank of the river. It was mounted on four pillars some twelve feet in height, and was entered by means of a ladder placed at the door. These supports not long before had been stanch cotton-wood trees, and their roots still held fast in the ground despite its frequent submergence. Having been sawn off at a height that lifted the little domicile to a level with the crest of the levee beyond, they served so far to render the hearth-stone safe from the dangers of flood. If the river should rise above this limit, why then was the deluge, indeed, and the swamper's hut must needs share with the more opulent and protected holdings the common disaster of the overflow.

The two men were standing on the brink of the high bank, using alternately a binocle of elaborate finish and great power. The swamper, however, presently relinquished the glass altogether to his

companion, who was evidently a stranger and of a much higher condition in life. He seemed to develop an inexplicable agitation as he continued to gaze through the lenses across the tawny expanse of the river at the big, white bulk of the steamer stranded on the bar, and the groups of passengers on the decks, easily differentiated as they loitered to and fro. His breath was coming in quick gasps,—he was suddenly a-quiver in every fiber. All at once he broke forth as if involuntarily: "Colonel Kenwynton, by God!"

There was a sort of frenzy of recognition in the tense bated tones, yet incredulity too, as one might doubt the reality of a vision, though incontestably perceived. The swamper watched in silence, patient, curious, sinister, this manifestation of emotion. It seemed to surprise him when the stranger spoke to him with a certain unthinking openness.

"Did you notice,—could you distinguish—a gentleman there on the hurricane deck walking to and fro,—his hair is white,—oh, how strange!—his hair is white!"

He asked the question in an eager, excited way, his dark, distended eyes wildly agaze.

"Yes, sir,—oh, yes, sir,—I seen him plain," the swamper replied casually, but he did not relax the keenness of his inquisitive observation of the stranger beside him, nor even again glance at the boat.

"Did you ever before see him?" The question was less a gasp than a convulsive snap,—it was articulated in such a paroxysm of excitement.

"Yes, sir,—oh, yes, sir."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes, sir,—oh, yes, sir."

The swamper's replies were as mechanical as the ticking of a clock.

The stranger turned, lowered the binocle and glanced at him with an odd blending of animosity and contempt. The swamper was of an aspect queerly disheveled, water-soaked and damaged, collapsed almost out of all semblance of humanity. He suggested some distorted bit of unclassified and worthless flotsam of the great river, washed ashore in one of its stupendous floods and left high and dry with other foul detritus when the annual shrinkage regained once more low water mark. He was an elderly man with a pallid, pasty face, large, pouch-like cheeks and a sharp rodential nose. His small, bright eyes were so furtive of expression that they added to his rat-like intimations and he had a long bedraggled grizzled beard. He wore trousers of muddy corduroy, and a ragged old gray sweater. His sodden, diluvian, pulpy aspect would justify the illusion that he had been drowned a time or two, resuscitated and dried out, each immersion leaving traces in slime, and ooze, and water-stains on his garments and character. He must have seemed incongruous, indeed, with the acquaintance he claimed, for it was a most commanding and memorable figure focused by the lenses.

"Who is he, then,—what is his name?" the stranger asked with sudden heat, as if he fancied some deception was practiced upon him, and evidently all unaware that he had himself, in the surprise of the first glimpse, pronounced aloud the name he sought. His interlocutor discerned his incredulity and replied with a flout.

"Who? him?—that old blow-hard? Why ever' body all up an' down the ruver knows old Cunnel Kenwynton."

"God!" exclaimed the wild-eyed stranger, with a most poignant intonation, "to doubt my own sight,—my own memory,—my"—he became suddenly conscious of that sinister scrutiny, so much more discriminating and intelligent than accorded with the status of the water-rat that it had an inimical suggestion. He broke off with an abrupt air of explanation. "I have been under treatment for—for—an ocular difficulty, my eyes, you know."

"Edzac'ly," exclaimed the swamper, with a tone of bland acceptance of the statement. "Well, now, Mister, I thought your eyes appeared queer."

"Do they?" asked the stranger with an inexplicable eagerness. "Have they an odd expression,—to your mind?"

"Why, I dunno ez I would have tooken notice of it, but my darter-in-law, Jessy Jane, remarked it las' night. She is mighty keen, though, Jessy Jane is,—an' spies out mos' ever' think."

The stranger was a conventional, reputable looking person, not remarkable in any respect save for that recurrent optical dilatation. He was neatly dressed in one of the smart hand-me-down suits to be had anywhere in these times and he wore a dark derby hat. He was himself an elderly man, although he had a certain fresh pallor that bespeaks an indoor life and that gave him an unworn aspect of youth. His clean-shaven face was notably delicate, but the years were registered in the fine script of wrinkles about the eyes and were obvious to the careful observer. He had dark, straight, thin hair, and

keen features, and there was an intent look in his wild, dark eyes. He cast over his shoulder so lowering a glance at the daughter-in-law under discussion, a young woman who was sitting in the door of the cabin, that even at the distance she marked the expression of disfavor, of suspicion, of resentment that informed it. She could not divine the nature of their communication but, justifying old Josh Berridge's account of her powers of discernment, she knew, in some subtle way, that she was its subject. She tossed her head with a flirt of indifference and spat out on the ground below her contempt for the stranger's displeasure.

Her red calico dress and her tousled mass of copper red hair made a bit of flare amidst the dull hues of the somber scene. As she sat on the elevated threshold at the summit of the ladder that led to the door she was dandling a muscular though small infant in her arms, who with his blond, downy head almost inverted twisted here and there with motions so sudden and agile that he might have been expected presently to twist quite out of the negligent maternal clasp and fall to the earth below. But, suddenly, she rose and, tossing the child to her shoulder, went within the house.

So definite was the impression of something abnormal about the stranger that she experienced a sentiment of relief when the swamper came in to his supper alone. "Jessy Jane," he said, pausing in the doorway and jerking his thumb over his shoulder to indicate the subject of his discourse, "that man is as queer a fish as ever war cotched. Says he is waitin' fur a boat an' has hired my old dugout an' is pad-

dling out to that air steamboat whut's aground on the sand-bar."

She gazed dully at him, a big spoon in her hand with which she had been lifting a mass of cat-fish from a skillet on a red-hot monkey-stove. "Nuthin' queer in that as I kin see,—Hesh up!" she broke off in jocose objurgation of the baby who was beaming upon the supper table from where he was tied in one of the bunks and who lifted his voice vociferously, apparently in pæans of praise of the great smoking cat-fish spread at length on a dish. "You ain't goin' ter have none,—fish-bone git cotched in yer gullet, an' whar-r would Tadpole-Wheezie be then." Resuming the conversation in her former serious tone, "What's queer in waitin' fur a boat? Plenty folks have waited fur boats, an' catch 'em an' rid on 'em too."

"But this feller is goin' ter catch a boat what can't go nowhar. He is right now paddlin' fur dear life out to the *Cher'kee Rose*, old stick-in-the-mud, out thar on the sand-bar."

Josh Berridge flung himself down in a chair at the half prepared table, and awaited there in place the completion of the "dishing up" of supper.

She stood eyeing him doubtfully, the big spoon still in her hand. "I wonder all them passengers don't come ashore, an' track off through the woods, like he spoke of doin' las' night an' flag the train."

"Gosh, Jessy Jane,—it's a durned sight too fur. Ten mile, at least, ez the crow flies, an' thar ain't no road nor nuthin'."

He said no more for his mouth was full, and the attention of the woman was diverted by the entrance of her husband, with the declaration that he was as

hungry as a bear. He was of a bulky presence, seeming to crowd the restricted little apartment, which was more like the cabin of a shanty-boat than a room in a stationary dwelling. It was of a hazy aspect, low-ceiled and soot-blackened, as shown by a lamp swinging from the central beam, smoking portentously from an untrimmed protrusion of charring wick. Two tiers of bunks were arranged nautically on either side, and the windows still above were small oblong apertures, suggestive of cabin lights or transoms; perhaps this had been their earlier use, for several articles about the place betokened an origin inapposite to the culture and condition of its occupants. A fine barometer in a shining mahogany case graced the wall near a door leading to an inner apartment. The handsome binocular glass lay on a shelf so rough that the undressed wood offered an opportunity for splinters to every unwary touch. Each of the pillow-cases bore a rude patch where the name of a steamboat had been cut out, and the dirty cloth on the table was of linen damask suited to the requirements of the somewhat exacting traveling public. Even the bowl into which the woman was heaping a greasy mass of potatoes and pork from the pot was of the decorated china affected by the packet usage, and a compote filled with doughy fat biscuits bore the title of a steamer that went to the bottom one windy night some years ago.

Now and again the ladder without would creak beneath the weight of a sudden footfall when the woman would desist from her occupation, the big spoon brandished in her hand, and her red hair flying fibrous in the hot breath of the stove, to mark in eager excitement the entrance of first one and

then another figure that seemed evolved from the falling night, cogeners of the gloom and the solitude, normal to the place and the hour.

“Ye’re sharp on time,—how did ye know the *Cher’kee Rose* had struck?” she cried, as a pallid, wiry, small man with close cropped sandy hair, wearing jockey boots and riding breeches, with a stable cap on one side of his head, climbed into view up the ladder without.

He vouchsafed her a wink of his lashless, red-lidded left eye, in full of all accounts of greeting and reply. He stood flicking his boots with a crop and wagged his sandy head knowingly at the group of men about the stove.

“I was at Cameron Landing, the last p’int she teched. I went aboard an’ seen her passenger list. She’s got some swell guys aboard.”

“Pity, then, she didn’t go down when she struck,” said a lowering, square-faced man, of a half sailor aspect, the master of a shanty-boat lying snugly under the willows in a bayou hard by. “The water on this side the bar is full twenty fathom, even at dead low water.”

“Bless my stirrups, that’s one hundred an’ twenty feet!” cried “Colty” Connover, palpably dismayed by the loss of the opportunities of the accident.

“The wind is fixin’ ter blow,” said Daniel Berridge from the table, with his mouth full, but glancing up through the open door at the darkening skies. “Mought h’ist the old tub off the tow-head after all’s come an’ gone.”

“Oh, oh, oh, oh,” said Connover, wagging his head expressively,—“there’d be rich pickings for

true in those passengers' baggage." He smacked his lips wistfully.

For this was a coterie of riverside harpies brought together by the rumor of the disaster in the hope of the opportunity of spoils. They had long infested the riparian region, not only baffling the law and justice but even evading suspicion. Their operations were cleverly diversified, restricted to no special locality. By the aid of the swift and inconspicuous dug-out an emissary could drop down the river twenty miles and abstract a bale of cotton, from a way-landing, awaiting shipment, or roll off a couple of boxes or a barrel, under cover of the water, till such time as the shanty-boater should find it practicable to fish them thence some dark midnight,—while the suits for their non-delivery dragged on in the courts between the shipper and the consignee. A bunch of yearlings driven off from the herds that were wont to be grazed in the "open swamp" throughout seasons of drought when these dense low-lying woodlands are clear of water, would seem the enterprise of professed cattle thieves, and suspicion pointed to rogues of bucolic affiliations, but the beef had been slaughtered and salted and shipped down the Mississippi by the small craft of the tramp or pirate proclivities and sold in distant markets before the depletion in the numbers of the herd was discovered by the owner.

The cunning and capacity that devised these exploits tolerated no policy of repetition. Never did the gang fit their feet into their old tracks. Thus the thwarted authorities failed of even a clew to forward conviction and certain tempting baits dangled unnoticed and ineffective, while the miscreants for

a season went their ways with circumspection and kept well within the law. Only once did they attempt the exploit of a railroad hold-up, and so entirely did it succeed that at the mere recollection the small, light gray eyes of the shanty-boater narrowed to a mere slit as he gazed speculatively from his chair across the room and through the open door at the great dim bulk of the stranded steamboat, lying there on the bar in the midst of the weltering surges of deep, swift water on every side. There was no smoke from her chimneys, no stir now on her decks, but a series of shining yellow points had just begun to gleam from her cabin lights, and a circlet of shifting topaz reflections gemmed the turgid waters. Purple and gray were the clouds; the sky was starless and blank; the great bare terraces of the bank on either side were like a desert in extent, uninhabited, unfrequented. Anything more expressive of helplessness than the steamer aground it were difficult to conceive,—bereft of all power of locomotion, of volition, of communication.

“Now, just how many of those ‘swell guys’ are on that boat?” a deep bass voice queried.

The speaker was of more reputable aspect than any of the others. He was the only man in the room with a clean-shaven jaw and wearing a coat; the abnormal size of his right arm, visible under the sleeve, indicated the vocation of a blacksmith. He had a round bullet head that implied a sort of brute force, and his black hair was short and close-clipped. In view of his mental supremacy and his worldly superiority as a respectable mechanic the authority he arrogated was little questioned, and, as he flung himself back in his chair, tilted on the hind legs and

fixed his sharp black eyes on the half tipsy jockey, Connover sought to justify his statement by adducing proofs.

"Why," still flicking his boots and thrusting his stable-cap far back on his sparse sandy hair, "there is Edward Floyd-Rosney and family, and he is a millionaire. You are obliged to know that."

Jasper Binnhart nodded his head in acceptance of the statement.

"And, Lord, what a string he had before he sold out when he went abroad. He owned 'County Guy,' the third son of imported Paladin, dam Fortuna, blood bay, stands sixteen hands high, such action." He smote his meager thigh in the abandonment of enthusiasm. "I saw him in Louisville at the training stables—such form!"

"And who else?" demanded Binnhart.

"Why, a beautiful roan filly—three years old—Floyd-Rosney gave only three thousand dollars for her, but speedy! And he owned——"

"Who else is on that boat?" reiterated Binnhart raucously. "I don't want to hear 'bout no horses, without I'm on my shoeing stool," he added with a sneer.

"Oh, yes, I know, of course." The jockey felt the bit himself and adapted his pace to the pressure of control. It seems strange to contemplate, but even such a nature as his has its æsthetic element, its aspirations and enthusiasms, its dreams and vicissitudes of hope. All these just now had a string on them, as he would have phrased it, and were dragging in the dust. He had ridden with credit in several events elsewhere, but he was the victim of intemperance and his weak moral endowment offered spe-

cial material for the fashioning of a cat's paw. It was said and believed that he had "pulled" more than one horse in a race, and although this was not indisputable, the suspicion barred him from the employ of cautious turfmen. In connection with his frequent intoxication, it had brought him down at last to work as a groom for his daily bread, and what was to him more essential, his daily dram, in a livery stable in the little inland town of Caxton, some ten or twelve miles distant, for there was scant opportunity in view of the stringent laws against gambling to ply his vocation as a jockey in Mississippi.

"Oh, you are talkin' about the passenger list. The *Cherokee Rose* has sure got swells aboard. There are Mrs. Dean and Miss Hildegarde Dean. You must have read a deal about *her* in the society columns of the newspapers. She won hands down in Orleans las' winter. Reg'lar favorite, an' distanced the field."

"I ain't talkin' about the wimmen," said the smith.

"Well, mebbe old Horace Dean ain't as rich as some, but they are dressed as winners, sure. I seen 'em in a box at the horse-show—I was there with Stanley's stable—an' the di'monds Mrs. Dean had on mos' put out my eyes."

"She don't wear di'monds on a steamboat, I reckon," put in Mrs. Berridge. "Them I have seen on deck ginerally don't look no better 'n—'n—me."

"But you are a good-looker, ennyways, Mrs. Berridge," said the jockey, and he paid her the tribute of another facetious wink.

"But the woman would carry her di'monds in her trunk or hand-bag," suggested the shanty-boater.

"Horace Dean ain't aboard, eh? Let us have the men's names," said the smith. He was turning the matter over exactly as if he had it in some raw material on the anvil before him, striking it here and there, testing its malleability, shaping it to utility.

"Oh, well, there's one of the Duccies, the fellow that has been abroad so long—registers from Lyons, France. Adrian Ducie."

The younger Berridge turned half around from the table, chewing hard to clear his mouth before he spoke impressively: "One of the Duccies? Now you are coming to the Sure-enoughs! They used to own Duciehurst. They did for a fack. Finest place in Mississippi; in the world, I reckon."

"But, used to be ain't now, by a long shot," said Jorrocks, the shanty-boater, sustaining the intention of the investigation. "No Ducie nowadays would be worth a hold-up."

"This is a young man?" Binnhart queried.

"Rising thirty, I reckon," replied the jockey.

"You dunno—you ain't seen his teeth," said Mrs. Berridge. "That's the way you jockeys jedge of age." She could be facetious, too.

"Then there's old Colonel Kenwynton?" said Conover.

"He has got a deal of fight left in him yet," observed Binnhart, reflectively. "He would put up a nervy tussle."

"Yes, sir," corroborated the shanty-boater, with emphasis. "The devil himself will have a tough job when he undertakes to tow old Jack Kenwynton in."

"There are several other men, names I don't

know—dark horses," said the jockey seriously, seeing at last the trend of the discussion.

Binnhart was slowly, thoughtfully, shaking his head. "A good many men, I misdoubts. Then there are the captain and the clerks and the mate, but they would all be took by surprise, an' mos' likely without arms."

"An' then there's another man, besides," suggested the elder Berridge. A certain wrinkled anxiety had corrugated the bedraggled limpness of his countenance and he was obviously relieved by the effect of the computation of the odds.

"Oh, yes," cried Mrs. Berridge, "that comical galoot what bided here las' night, an' this evenin' hired our dugout an' paddled out to the steamboat. He ain't back yit." She paused at the door and peered into the gathering gloom.

"Jessy Jane," cried her husband with an accession of interest, "tell 'em all what you heard him say las' night. Every other word was 'Duciehurst.' "

The younger Berridge was a stalwart fellow, in attire and features resembling his father, save that his straw-tinted beard and shock of hair were not yet bleached by the river-damp and the damage of time to the dull drab hue of the elder's locks. The woman had evidently intended to reserve such values as she had discovered for the benefit of her own, her husband and his father. But Dan Berridge, all improvident and undiscerning, was gobbling a second great supply of the cat-fish, and did not even note the expanding interest that began to illumine Binnhart's sharp eyes as they followed her around the table while she again set on the platter. She sought to gain time and perchance to effect a diversion by

inviting him to partake of the meal, but he replied that he had eaten his supper already, "and a better one," he added as he cast a disparaging glance at the cloth. The rude jeer would have served to balk his curiosity, one might have thought,—that in resentment she would have withheld the disclosure he coveted. But the jeer tamed her. She realized and contemned their poverty, and despised themselves because they were so poor. The dignity of labor, the blessedness of content, the joy of health and strength, the relative values of the gifts of life, the law of compensation, no homilies had ever been preached here on these texts. She could not controvert nor contend. It was indeed a coarse, cheap meal brought to the door by the river, a poverty-cursed home on its fantastic stilts, where they might live only so long as the waters willed, and she was all at once ashamed of it, and of her own compact of rude comfort and quiescence with it. She had a certain spirit, however, and when the other visitors chuckled their enjoyment of her discomfiture she included them in the invitation after this wise, "Mebbe you-all ain't too proud to take a snack with us." The shanty-boater, who permitted nothing good to pass him, compromised on a slice of pork, eaten sandwich-wise, in a split pone of corn-bread held in his hands as he crouched over the monkey-stove at the other end of the room. Nevertheless, she was submissive and in some sort constrained to respond when Binnhart said with a suave intonation: "Yes, ma'am, we would like to hear from you about that talk of Duciehurst."

"I dunno what you mean," she said, still with an

effort to fence; "oh, yes, the man jus' talks in his sleep, that's all."

"He's got secrets," said her husband, over his shoulder to Binnhart. He paused suddenly with an appalled countenance to extract from his mouth a great spiny section of fishbone, which seemed to have caught on the words. "Tell on, Jessy Jane. I can't. I'm eatin'."

It was obviously useless to resist. "Why," she said, "when the baby had the croup las' night an' kep' me up an' awake—don't you dare to look at me an' laugh, you buzzard!" she broke off to speak to the infant, who was bouncing and crowing jovially at the end of his tether where he was tied in the bunk, "he knows I'm talkin' about him. Why, what was I saying? Oh, I was in the back room there, an' the man was sleepin' in here. An' he talked, an' talked in his sleep, loud fur true every wunst in a while. I wonder he didn't wake up everybody in the house."

"What did he say?" asked Binnhart, with a look of sharp curiosity.

"I didn't take time to listen much," replied the woman, fencing anew. "Old 'Possum thar," nodding at the baby, "looked like he'd choke every other minute. He'll smell of turkentine fur a month of Sundays. I fairly soaked his gullet with that an' coal-oil."

"A body kin make money out of other folks' secrets ef they air the right kind of secrets." Binnhart threw out the suggestion placidly.

The woman hesitated. She noted her father-in-law behind the stove, almost collapsing over his pipe, so inert he might scarcely make shift to fill it; her

husband, his younger image, was still at the table, lazily chasing the last morsel of fish about his greasy plate with a bit of cornbread. Little might they hope to metamorphose the babble of a dreamer into discoveries of value. Jasper Binnhart, on the contrary, was a man of force, of action, the leader, the prime mover, in every scheme that had brought to them some measure of success and gain, and then, too, would she not be present, to aid, to hear, invested with the mystery and controlling its preservation.

She took on the air of retrospective pondering as she sank down in a chair on one side of the table, putting her bare elbows on the cloth and supporting her chin in her hands. "Lemme see," she said, "ef I kin call any of his gabble to mind. "She glanced up to find Binnhart's eyes, contracted to mere points of light, fixed upon her, and once more she bent her gaze on the pattern of the damask.

"'Twar mos'ly 'bout Duciehurst, all night, all night. Duciehurst was the word."

"That sounds like something doing," Binnhart remarked. "All my life I have heard of hidden money at Duciehurst."

Jessy Jane ceased to pose. She lifted her head suddenly with the contempt of the uninformed, her lips thickening with a sneer. "Now, what fool would put money in that old ruined shell, instead of a bank?"

"Why, lots of folks, during the war," explained Binnhart. "The banks were not open then, and people hid their vallybles wherever they could. After the peace some things, here and there, were never found again."

"Why, shucks, Mrs. Berridge, the name of Duciehurst is famous for hidden treasure, has been ever since I could remember," the shanter-boater said. "You see, Major Ducie and two of his sons were killed in the war, an' only one was left, this passenger's father." He jerked his thumb toward the bar, where the boat lay so still in the night, amidst its element of surging waters. "This son, being so young at the time, just a child, didn't know anything about where they had stowed the family silver and jewels, and a power of gold money, they say."

"The family gave up the search more than forty years ago, and the place was sold to satisfy a mortgage," Binnhart commented.

"But the river folks take up the search every wunst in a while, an' go thar and dig around the walls," said the younger Berridge.

"Sure!" exclaimed the shanty-boater. "I have been thar myself with a git-rich-quick gang." He leered humorously at the party from behind the stove-pipe. Presently he continued reminiscently:—

"Then pirates tore all the hearths up, mighty nigh, that night. They had a stonemason along, with crowbars and chisels, an' such like tools. He was a tombstone worker, an' I reckon his biz queered the job, for we found nothing at all."

"'Tain't in a hearthstone," said the woman, suddenly. "Is there anything about a house named pillow? He kep' a-talkin' about a pillow—I thought he meant the one he had his head on."

Jasper Binnhart started as with a galvanic shock. He suddenly let down the forelegs of his chair and sat stiff and upright.

"Pillar?" he said, in a curiously muffled tone.

"Has this mansion of Duciehurst got anything like a porch with posts? I have never seen the river-front of the house."

"Posts!" exclaimed the younger Berridge. "The porch has got posts the size of a big gum tree, a round dozen, too, an' mighty nigh as high as a gum tree." He fell to steadily picking his teeth with a fish-bone, and idly riding his chair to and fro.

"What did he say about 'pillars,' Mrs. Berridge?" asked the blacksmith, eagerly.

"He talked about a base, an' a pilaster, an' columns, an' a capital."

"That's Jackson, capital o' Miss'ippi, seat of government, second to none in the Union," explained her husband.

"Sometimes he would call 'Archie, Archie.' "

"Lieutenant Archibald Ducie as sure as you are born," said the shanty-boater, solemnly. "He died in Vicksburg, an' he war the one rumored to have had charge of hidin' the money."

"This man never said nothin' 'bout no money. Jes' kept on 'bout docyments, an' a chist," persisted Mrs. Berridge, incredulously.

"Money mought have been in the chist," remarked her husband.

"He war specially concerned 'bout a 'pilaster'—he went back to that ag'in an' ag'in. He'd whisper, sly an' secret, 'in the pilaster.' What is a pilaster?"

There was no information forthcoming, and she presently resumed, with a drawling voice and a dispirited drooping head. "He seemed to say the docyments was there, though I thought he meant something about a pillow. I wish I had paid mo' attention, though I had never heard 'bout a pot o' money

bein' hid at Duciehurst. I wish I could git the chance to hear him talk agin in his sleep."

"But will he come back?" asked Binnhart, eagerly.

"Sure. He said so when he hired the dugout," said the old water-rat; "but I made him pay fust, as much as it is wuth—two dollars. He's got plenty rocks in his pocket."

"Well, I should think he'd stay the night with the steamboat, a man of his sort," Binnhart said. He cast a glance of gruff distaste about the squalid and malodorous place, reeking with the greasy smell of fish, and the sullen lamp. He thought of the contrast with the carpeted saloon, the glittering chandeliers, the fine pure air, the propinquity of people of high tone and good social station. Strange! Indeed, it would seem that no man in his senses would resort instead to this den of thieves and cut-throats.

"He'll come back fast enough," protested the elder Berridge. "There's something queer about that man, though he made no secret o' his name, Captain Hugh Treherne."

"There'll be something mighty queer about me if I don't git a-holt of some of them rocks in his pockets ye war tellin' about," declared the shanty-boater.

"What ailed him to take out for the steamer?" demanded Binnhart.

"He seemed all struck of a heap when he seen old Cunnel Kenwynton through the spy-glass. He claims he knows the old Cunnel," replied the water-rat.

"And yet he is coming back here," exclaimed Binnhart, incredulously. "I wish I could have heard him talk."

He rose, still with that intent and baffled look, and

went to the door staring out into the gloomy night to descry, if he might, the course of the little craft on the face of the waters and its progress; to canvass the object of the man who wielded the paddle and the nature of the business he could have with old Colonel Kenwynton; and to speculate in futile desperation as to the knowledge he might possess of the storied treasure of Duciehurst, and how this secret might be wrested from him.

## CHAPTER III

THAT night Colonel Kenwynton had a strange dream. He had come to the time of life when he had no appreciable future. His possibilities were limited to the renewal of his promissory notes secured on his mortgaged lands and the stress to feed the monster debt with its accustomed interest. Beyond these arid vicissitudes he never looked. The day bounded his scope of view. His life lay in the past, and although the present constrained his waking moments, all the furniture of his dreams had garnished the years come and gone. It was not strange to him, therefore, as he lay asleep in his berth, that he should hear in the shaking of the glass-door of his stateroom that opened on the guards the clanking of sabers. The sound was loud, assertive in the night. The wind had risen. Along the convolutions of the "great bends" it swirled, with a wide breathy resonance, the gusts seeming full of gasps. Now and then the timbers of the boat creaked and groaned and the empty chimneys towering into the gloom of the upper atmosphere sometimes piped forth sonorous blasts. No longer the somber monotony held the sky. Clouds were rolling in tumultuous surges from the south, and the wind fretted the currents into leaping turbulence as it struck upon the waves, directly against the course of the waters. Low along the horizon pale lightnings flickered. The river became weirdly visible

in these fluctuating glimmers, and anon there was only the sense of a vast black abyss where it flowed, and an overpowering realization of unseen motion—for it was silent, this stupendous concourse of the waters of the great valley, silent as the grave. In the fitful illuminations the lace-like summit of the riparian forest would show momentarily against the clouds; the big, inert structure of the boat, and long ghastly stretch of the arid sand-bar, would be suddenly visible an instant, then as suddenly sunken into darkness.

And again and again the door of Colonel Kenwynton's stateroom shook with a clatter in its casing.

He was not a light sleeper, which is usual to old age. His robust physique was recruited by the sound slumber that might have accorded with a score less years than had whitened his hair. The lightnings, glimmering ever and anon through the glass door and into his placid, aged, sleeping face—that ere long should sleep hardly more placidly and to stir no more—did not rouse him. The violent vibrations of the glass door would scarcely have impinged upon his consciousness save that the sound suggested the clash of sabers. But all at once Colonel Kenwynton's whole being was translated into a day of the past—a momentous day. The air blared with a trumpet's imperious mandate; the clank of sabers filled his ears, and in the lightning's pale flare he saw, plainly against the surging clouds of the southwest, the face of the man who had ridden close to his bridle rein in a furious cavalry charge that broke the serried ranks of a redoubtable square.

"Regiment! Draw—swords! Trot!—March!  
Gallop!—March! Charge!—Charge!"

The stentorian, martial cry was filling the restricted spaces of the little stateroom. Colonel Kenwynton, awakened by the sound of his own voice, had pulled himself up on his elbow and was staring in amazement at the dull, opaque black square of the glass door of his stateroom, which might be only discerned because the apartment was partially illumined through the transom of the opposite door, admitting the tempered radiance of the lights burning all night in the saloon within.

He was nettled as with a sense of ridicule. He had known an old war-horse that after peace had been degraded to cheap domestic uses, but was accustomed to prance in futile senility and in stately guise to the sound of a child's drum. He listened to discern if his wild martial cry had reached other ears. No—the scoffers slept. Peace to their pillows. He grimly wished them rest. He—he was an old man, an old man, and not of much account any more, save at the reunions. Ah, it must have been the associations of the reunion which resurrected that face—the face of a man to whom he owed much, a man but for whom he would scarcely be here now, laying his head down in undisturbed slumber. Once more the similitude of the clank of sabers. With the thought of the possible ridicule should he again, in his dreaming, audibly refer this noisy tumult to the memory of his battles—fought anew here in the dim midnight, he leaned forward to obviate the repetition of the sound and the renewal of the hallucination. From his berth he easily reached the door to the guards, flung it open, and

lay down content in the comparative quiet. The river air was dank, but this was on the lee side of the boat, and though he could hear the wind rush by he could only slightly feel its influx here. Still illusions thronged the night. The chimneys piped in trumpet tones to his dreams. The doors of neighboring staterooms clanked faintly; whole squadrons rode by, their sabers unsheathed, and suddenly he became conscious of a presence close at hand that he could not discern in his sleep. All at once he was stiff, vigilant, expectant, fired by the pulses of a day long dead!

“The parole, officer of the day,” he gasped, curiously waking, yet still in the thrall of slumber.

“Shoulder to shoulder,” came in a shivering whisper from the twilight of the stateroom.

Suddenly impressed with the reality of the experience the old man, agitated, almost speechless, breathless, struggled up on his elbow.

“Why, Captain,” he began, in a piping travesty of his wonted sonorous greeting, “when did you come aboard?”

“Colonel,” said the man standing by the bed, and even the twilight glimmer of the room showed the wild light in his eyes, “you haven’t forgotten the day when ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’ was the parole?”

“Never—! Never!” Colonel Kenwynton clasped his hand on the visitor’s hand. “But for you on that day I should have been these forty odd years in hell.”

“Then follow me. I have something to say. It must be in private—something to disclose. You can trust me, Colonel—Shoulder to Shoulder!”

“Trust you? To the death—Shoulder to Shoul-

der!" Colonel Kenwynton cried, in a fervor of enthusiasm.

Nevertheless he was chilled while he hastily half dressed and emerged into the dank obscurity of the guards. His hand trembled as he laid it on the stair rail. "An old man," his lips were involuntarily formulating the words, as he followed his guide, who was descending to the lower deck. "An old man," and he drew his overcoat about him.

Colonel Kenwynton was born to authority and had had the opportunities of command. But his martial experience had taught him also to obey, and when he had once accepted a mandate he did not hesitate nor even harbor an independent thought. With his soft, broad felt hat drawn far over his brows, down the stairs thumped his groping old feet, doggedly active. The wind was surging amidst the low clouds which were flying before the blast in illimitable phalanxes in some distraught panic of defeat. There must have been a moon lurking beyond their rack and rout, for the weird night landscape was strangely distinct, the forests that restricted the horizon bowed, and bent, and rose again in definite undulations to the successive gusts. One might hardly say how the surface of the far spread of water was discerned, dark, vaguely lustrous, with abysmal suggestions, though with never a glimmer, save where the dim lights of the boat pierced the glooms with a dull ray, here and there, or lay along ripples close at hand with a limited, shoaling glister.

These shallows covered the line of the treacherous sand-bar that had been secretly a-building all summer beneath the surface with the deposits of silt and in the uncovenanted ways of the great water

course, till now the tow-head was possibly a peninsula in lieu of the island it had once been, and the packets of the line would never again find free passage as of yore between its stretches and the bank. Accustomed eyes could see how far extended the stabilities of the tow-head and thus differentiate the definite land formation from the element of land transition, that was neither land nor water. Here the wind made great sport, shrilling along the desolate arid spaces of the pallid sand dunes defenseless against the blast. A wild night, and cold.

The tread of his guide was silent—one might almost say secret. He came to a shuddering galvanic pause as he suddenly encountered a watchman, a lantern in his hand. The big, burly Irishman gazed with round, unfriendly, challenging eyes at the foremost of the two advancing figures, then catching sight of the familiar face of the Colonel his whole aspect changed; he beamed with jovial recognition.

"Oh, the Cunnel, is ut? Faix, the top o' the mornin' to yez, sor, if it's got anny top to 't—'tis after twelve. This grisly black night seems about the ground floor of hell. The river's risin' a bit, sor; an' if this wind would fall we'd sure have a rain, an' git out o' this, foreshortly."

He touched his hat and moved on, the feeble halo of the lantern betokening his progress among the shadowy piles of freight, dimly visible in the dull light of the fixed lamps.

Not even a speculation did Colonel Kenwynton allow himself when suddenly his precursor put a foot on the gunwale of the boiler deck and sprang over into the darkness. The old soldier followed

without a moment's doubt. The unseen water surged about his feet, cold as ice, and at the swiftly flowing, unexpected impact he caught his breath with a gasp. But the guide had forgotten the lapse of time—how old a man, how feeble, was the erstwhile stalwart commander. He pressed on, the water splashing about his feet, now rising to ankle depth, now even deeper, once surging about his knees. Even Colonel Kenwynton at last had a thought of protest. This was always a good soldier, Captain Treherne, but a bit reckless and disposed to unnecessary risks. There was no word of remonstrance, however, from the elder man, and he was fairly blown when suddenly Captain Treherne paused at a considerable distance in a level space near the river's margin where was beached a clumsy little craft which the Colonel recognized as a dug-out.

Captain Treherne seemed all unconscious of the pallid countenance, the failing breath, the halting step of the old man. For, indeed, Colonel Kenwynton was fain to catch at his companion's arm for support as he listened, panting.

"Come, Colonel, you will come with me. I need your advice. You can wield a paddle, and together we can make the distance."

Only the obviously impossible checked the old soldier.

"Wield a paddle against this current, my dear sir? Make the distance! You forget my age—seventy-five, sir; seventy-five years."

"It is not life and death, Colonel. We have faced that together, you and I, and laughed at both. Dishonest possession is involved now, and legalized

robbery, and hidden assets. And *I* have the secret of the cache, Colonel, *I*, alone. It must be revealed. I need your help. This is the crucial crisis of my life. My life—!” He broke off with an accent of scorn—“of lives worth infinitely more than mine. And, Colonel Kenwynton,” he laid a sudden, lean hand on the old man’s arm, “the helpless! For they know nothing of their rights. It must be revealed to one who will annul this wrong, this heinous disaster.”

He had drawn very close, and his grasp on the Colonel’s arm, that had once been so firm-fleshed and sinewy, seemed to crush the collapsed muscles into the very bone. The old man winced with the pain, but stood firm.

“I’m with you, heart and soul, always. Command me. But, my dear boy, this is impracticable. Let’s get a roustabout to row.”

The intensifying grip might really have broken the old man’s bone.

“Not for your life—never a whisper to any other living creature! Only you can do this. I—I—I should not be believed.”

“Not believed! You!” cried Colonel Kenwynton in a tone of such indignant, vicarious, insulted pride, that what self-control the other man possessed broke down; he flung his arms about the old man’s quivering frame, bowed his head on the Colonel’s shoulder and sobbed aloud.

“Not even you would believe me—if you knew—if you knew what I have been—what I am.”

“Exactly what I do know,” said the Colonel, sturdily. “You are overcome by your emotions, dear old fellow. You are overwrought. We will

put an end to this, sir. Come, halloo the boat. I can't halloo, Cap—think of that for me!—damn this cough! Halloo the boat, and tell the mate to send us a roustabout to paddle. Or, hadn't we better take the yawl? That dug-out looks tricky—and, by God, man, it's leaky." He had advanced to the brink where the craft lay.

"No, no," cried the other, "not a breath, not a whisper. It would frustrate all." Then impressively, "Colonel Kenwynton, strange things have come about in this country because of the war. The rich are the poor; the right are the wrong; the incompetent sit bridling in the places that the capable have builded; an old paper, an old treasure, lost time out of mind, would reverse some lives, by God! And *I* hold the secret, like an omnipotent fate. There must be no miscarriage of justice here, Colonel Kenwynton."

The old man's eyes stared through the dusk like an owl's.

"You didn't call me out here at this time of night to talk of titles to property and acts of justice, Hugh Treherne, in this marsh—why, there ain't a bull-frog left here."

He lifted his head and gazed out from the flapping broad brim of his hat at the windy waste of waters, the indefinite lines of the shore, the distant summits of the forest trees tossing to and fro against the tumultuous unrest of the clouded horizon.

Close at hand rose sheer precipitous elevations of the tow-head; seeming far away towered the great bulk of the grounded steamer, whitely glimmering through the night, her lamps a dim yellow

focus here and there, her fires extinguished, her engines sleeping and supine.

"I called you out here, Colonel, because you are the only man left in the world who respects his promise, who reverences his Maker, who trusts his friend and would go through fire and water on his summons."

"I'll take an affidavit to the water, dammy," said the Colonel, grimly, stamping about as the trickling icy streams ran sleekly down his garments, over his instep. "But come to the steamboat, Hugh. We'll have a glass of hot brandy and water, and talk this thing over in comfort."

Captain Treherne seemed to struggle for a modicum of self-control. His voice had a remonstrant cadence such as one might use in addressing a fractious child.

"Colonel, you knew once what a council of war might mean."

"Heigh? I did so—I did so."

"This is secret—to be kept in the bottom of your heart. Your own thoughts must not revolve about it, lest they grow too familiar and canvass details with which you have no concern."

"Hugh, I am an old man. I don't believe it, as a general thing. The rheumatism has to give me a sharp pinch to remind me of the fact. I couldn't paddle a boat to save my life—and against that current."

It showed in the chiaro-oscuro like the solution of the problem of perpetual motion as the murky waters sped past.

"Tell me here and now. Where in all the world could we be more private?"

Captain Treherne lifted his head and looked about him,—only the bare sand of the bar, dimly visible in the vague light of the clouded moon, and of a differing tint from the dull neutral hue of the atmosphere of darkness. The steamer was absolutely silent, save as a loose chain might clank, swinging in the wind, for at this distance one could not discern the shaking of the transoms in their casings. There was no sight or sound of living creature, until a great bird, driven forth from its roost by the falling of a bough, or evicted by the wind, went screaming overhead. A shrill blast pursued his flight and presumably from the dark distance down the river one could not have distinguished the sounds of the living cry from the skirling of the restless spirit of the air.

"We crossed the river in a dug-out, under the nose of a gunboat," Captain Treherne began, suddenly.

"Who? When? Where?" interrupted the old man, his face vaguely mowing under his big hat as he sought to compose his features.

"How can I tell where? In forty years who knows any locality in the course of this deceitful old river? All over here," he pointed to the expanse of waters, "used to be dense cypress woods. You couldn't find the sign of a tree now, unless some snag gets washed up by the current."

"For the government snag-boats to pull up," commented Colonel Kenwynton.

"Victor Ducie had been wounded, it was thought mortally, in a skirmish on the Arkansas side, and his brother, Archie, and I,—we were together in the rangers then,—slipped through the lines one dark

midnight to Duciehurst with the news. You remember the Duccies?"

"Indeed, indeed, I do. There is a gentleman of that name—"

But Treherne was going on. "Mrs. Duccie determined to go to her son Victor at once; she had only one of her children at home then, a twelve-year-old boy named Julian, and she could take him with her. The country was full of bands of wandering marauders and bushwhackers, and in leaving the house Archie placed a few of his father's most important papers, with a lot of specie, and some family jewels, in a strong box, which we wrapped in an old knapsack and hid away."

He had pushed his hat back from his brow and Colonel Kenwynton felt a pang of blended pity and surprise to note that the head was nearly bald. The years had trafficked with Treherne as well as with himself, hard dealings, it seemed. For they had taken his youth, his spirit, his pervasive cheer; there was something indefinable suggested that savored of deep melancholy. And had these covetous years given him full value in return—learning, in the lessons of life, just judgment, self-control, disciplined purpose, earnest effort, and, last and not least, resignation and calm and restful faith? Colonel Kenwynton was unwittingly shaking his old white head at the thought in his mind. Time had not dealt honestly by Hugh Treherne. Time had exacted usury and had paid no fair equivalent for the ineffable possession of youth. Colonel Kenwynton realized, however, that his own foible was hasty judgment, and he sought to hold his conclusions in suspension while he listened.

"We will come to the end of the story sooner if I give him his head," he said to himself and ruefully added as he shivered in his drenched garb, "that is, if it *has* any end."

"Archie understood the value of these papers of his father's," Treherne resumed suddenly. "There was a mortgage on Duciehurst that had been lifted, but as all courts of record were closed by the operations of war the satisfaction had not been noted on the registered instrument. Carroll Carriton, who held the mortgage, happened to be in Mississippi at the time and he executed a formal release, and quit claim, signed and witnessed, but, of course, not registered. You know the chaotic state of courts of law at that time. The release also expressed a formal relinquishment of the promissory notes, secured on the land, for they were not returned; in fact, all the original papers were still out, having been placed for safekeeping in a bank in Nashville, Tennessee, where Carriton then resided, and which was within the Federal lines. The whole matter of the lifting of the mortgage and the full satisfaction of the debt was thoroughly understood between the principals and the witnesses, although it was a hasty transaction and in a way irregular, owing to the lack of facilities for recording the instruments in the state of war."

"But, look here," cried the Colonel in great excitement, "Duciehurst—you know, I was a friend of George Ducie—Duciehurst was sold to satisfy that mortgage, in behalf of the heirs of Carroll Carriton."

"Ah, Lord. That's why I am here, Colonel," cried Treherne with a strange note of pathos.

"But, man alive, you ought to have been here forty years ago with Carriton's release."

"Ah-h, Lord, Colonel, you don't understand."

"But I do understand, I understand mighty well," cried the Colonel. "Archie, God bless his soul, I remember him like yesterday, died of typhoid fever in Vicksburg, where his father was killed by the explosion of a cannon during the siege. His mother died in Arkansas, succumbed to pneumonia, contracted on the river that cold night when she crossed it to join her wounded son, and never returned to Duciehurst. Victor did not die till long afterward, he recovered from his wound and fell at last in the battle before Nashville. Not one of the family was left when the war closed except the youngest son, Julian, and although the suit on the promissory notes, brought by the executors of Carriton, was defended in his behalf, he being a minor at the time, no proof of the satisfaction of the debt could be made, and in default of payment the mortgage was foreclosed, and the magnificent estate of Duciehurst went under the hammer for a mere fraction of its value in the collapsed conditions of those disorganized times."

"Ah-h-hh, Lord, Colonel," Treherne was swaying back and forth as in a species of anguish.

"No time to say 'Ah, Lord, Colonel,'" the old man muttered the words in irascible mimicry. "Where did you and Archie hide that knapsack?" and, with increasing sternness, "why have you never produced those valuables?"

Was there a fluctuating glimmer of moonlight in the rack of clouds, or did the pallid day look forth for one moment, averse and reluctant—he saw dis-

tinctly that face which he once knew so well, with something new, strangely unrecognizable upon it. Then he had a sudden vision of a scene wreathed in the smoke of cannon and the mists of rain; the glitter of dull gray light on the polished, serried, fixed bayonets of an infantry square; the sense of the motion of a mad tumultuous gallop of a charge; the sound of trumpets wildly blowing, pandemonium, yells, shrieks of pain, hoofbeats, a gush of blood suffusing eyes, and all consciousness lost save that this man was helping him to his own horse from under the carcass of the slain charger, humbly holding by the stirrup in their mad precarious escape through the broken square.

The years since that momentous day had been something to Colonel Kenwynton, and but for this man's courage and devotion he would not have lived them.

"Hugh, dear old boy, remember one fact. Through everything misty, I trust you; I trust you implicitly, Hugh. I know your honorable motives. Tell me anything you will, but through thick and thin I trust you."

"The Ducie valuables are what I am coming to," said Treherne uneasily, his voice husky, his articulation muffled, his tongue thick. "We hid 'em—Archie and I. We hid 'em at Duciehurst in the mansion. That is what I want to tell you."

He paused to gaze about, pointing wildly, now up, now down the river.

"Then we crossed there, no, there, and landed on the Arkansas side. We had put Mrs. Ducie and Julian into the skiff, which we rowed ourselves. She had a lot of things with her that she was taking to

Victor, bed-linen, blankets, clothes, medicines, wines and such like, so hard to come by in the Confederacy in those times. We landed there, no, *there*."

Again he was pointing wildly from place to place. Now and then he took short, agile runs to and fro, as if he sought a better view in the windy obscurity.

"It was very cold and a pitch black night. We almost got under the hull of a Yankee gunboat—she was a vessel that had been captured from the Confederates, armored with iron rails, you know—that kind of iron-clad. As she swung at anchor I wonder the suction didn't swamp us, but it didn't. The look-out on deck never challenged nor heard us. We hit it like the bull's eye, at the Arkansas landing,—Archie knew every twist and quirk in the current like an old song, born at Duciehurst, you know. And after we made it to the farm-house, where Victor was lying at the point of death it seemed, we returned to our command according to orders, our leave being expired, for we had already hid the box in the knapsack at Duciehurst. And that's all."

He laid his hand on Colonel Kenwynton's shoulder and gazed wistfully into his face. Day was coming surely, for the elder man's feebler vision read a strange fact in those eyes, a fact that made him shudder, even when half perceived, a fact against which his credulity revolted.

"Hugh, Hugh, why in the name of God have you not produced those papers, restored the gold and jewels?"

"Why, why, why," Treherne's voice rose to a shriek. "Why, I have *forgotten* where they were hidden. Forgotten! Forgotten! Forgotten!"

Colonel Kenwynton was trembling like a leaf. A

chill keener than the cold had set his heart a-quiver. "Forgotten," he echoed in a vague fright. "Forgotten—impossible!"

The contradiction seemed to restore Treherne—not so much that it aroused the instinct of contention as the determination to set himself right in the eyes of his old commander.

"Do you know, Colonel, where I have been these forty years?" he demanded, quietly.

"I thought, in Paradise, dear old boy. I often asked, but could never hear a word."

Wherever he had been it was evident he had not been happy there. The trembling clasp of Colonel Kenwynton's arm on his shoulder brought the younger man's face down on the soft old wrinkled neck. But now there were no tears.

"I have been at Glenrose."

The words came from between set teeth, in the merest thread of a voice.

"Glenrose?" Colonel Kenwynton was aware that there was a significance in the reply which he had not grasped. "A beautiful little town, I am told, not far from Caxton, and growing quite into commercial importance," he said, glibly, his instinct of courtesy and compliment galvanically astir.

"Oh, horrible! Horrible!" Huge Treherne cried, poignantly. "Do you wonder now that I have forgotten? I can only wonder that I remember anything. They pretend that it was the wound at Franklin—the injury to the medulla substance."

"Hugh! Hugh!" the old Colonel was near to falling into the marshy slough at his feet. "You don't mean—you can't mean—the—asylum—the private sanatorium for the insane. Oh, my poor

boy, my poor boy. Wait, wait, give me your hand, I shall fall, wait, wait."

But there were sudden voices on the wind, calling here, calling there. Colonel Kenwynton heard his own name, but he did not respond. He only sought to detain his old comrade in his endearing clasp. The younger man was the stronger. Treherne wrested himself away, though not without repeated efforts, seized the paddle, pushed off the dug-out, and in a moment was lost in the gloom, for the moon was down, mists were rising from the low-lying borders of a bayou delta, and the frail craft was invisible on the face of the waters.

Colonel Kenwynton was not devoid of a certain kind of policy. He rallied his composure, realizing that the Captain of the steamboat had been alarmed by his absence on this precarious spot which the sound of his voice had betrayed, and before the emissaries sent out to seek him had reached the old man he had determined on his line of conduct. He maintained a studied reticence, the more easily since Treherne's presence had not been observed to excite curiosity and he himself was in a state of exhaustion and cold that precluded more than a shivering gasp in reply to questions. For he was determined to take counsel within himself before he indulged in explanations. He said to himself that he could better afford misconstruction of his conduct as some fantastic freak of drunkenness than run the risk of divulging the interests of another man to his possible detriment,—this man, who had so obviously, so appealingly suffered. He steeled himself in this, although he loved the approval, or rather the admiration, of his fellows, and he felt that

his position in some sort forfeited it, not being aware how thoroughly established he was as a public favorite, so that, indeed, he could hardly incur reprobation.

"Ain't the old Colonel game—must have been tight as a drum last night," the Captain said to the clerk. "He was making the tow-head fairly sing when I heard him, luckily enough."

Then to the Boots, who was looking from one to the other of the miry shoes into which he had thrust each hand: "Take his clothes and get them dried and pressed and see that you are careful about it. Colonel Kenwynton shall have the best service aboard as long as I have a plank afloat."

He had no plank afloat now, high and dry as the *Cherokee Rose* was on the sand-bar, but his meaning was clear, and Colonel Kenwynton's gear, despite its strenuous experience, seemed improved by this careful handling when once more donned, and he strode out, serene and smiling, into the outer air.

"How the old fellows stand their liquor—a body would think he was never overtaken in his life."

The Captain possessed the grace of reticence. None of the passengers had any inkling of the incident of the previous night, either as Colonel Kenwynton knew it, or in the interpretation which the Captain had placed upon it.

## CHAPTER IV

IF the patience, the concentration, the tireless endurance with which Jasper Binnhart awaited the return of the stranger, could have been applied to any object of worthy endeavor commensurate results must have ensued. It was necessarily, even in his own estimation, a fantastic expectation to learn from him aught of value concerning the treasure hidden at Duciehurst during the Civil War. If the stranger really had knowledge of the place of its concealment it was not likely that he would divulge it, since this would require the division of the windfall. But, he argued speciously, the man might need assistance, which probably explained his singular mission to the stranded *Cherokee Rose* to confer with Colonel Kenwynton. This confirmed the impression of the Berridge family that there was something eccentric, inexplicable about him. What he needed in such an enterprise was not a man of seventy-five, as soft as an old horse turned out to grass, but a master mechanic, such as himself, indeed, a man accustomed to the use of tools, with the dexterity imparted by constant work and the strength of muscles trained to endurance. The Colonel! Why he would be as inefficient as a baby. But perhaps only his advice was desired. Binnhart wished again and again that it had chanced that he could have seen the stranger first. More than once he despondently shook his round bullet head, with its

closely cropped black hair,—as sleek as a beaver's, from his habit of sousing it into the barrel of water where he tempered his steel,—as he sat on one of the steps of the rude flight that led to the door of the semi-aquatic dwelling of the water-rat's family, and gazed across the darkling river at the orange-tinted lights of the *Cherokee Rose*, lying high and dry on the bar. It was a pity for Colonel Kenwynton to be let into the secret at all. If the stranger had any right to possess himself of the hidden money he could boldly hire laborers and go to the spot in the open light of day. If his right were complicated or dubious, and this was most likely, or why had it lain so long unasserted, the old Colonel would clamp down on it with both feet. The Colonel had highflown antiquated ideas, unsuited to the world of to-day; Binnhart had heard him speak in public. He talked about honor, and patriotism, and fair-dealing in politics, and such chestnuts, and, although the people applauded, they were secretly laughing at him in their sleeves. No, no! Binnhart shook his head once more. It was a thousand pities to bring old Kenwynton into it at all; nothing he knew was of any value nowadays,—except the Colonel did know how a horse should be shod, and the proper care of the animal's feet; people said he used to own fine racers in his rich days. If Colonel Kenwynton returned with the stranger there might be trouble. The old man was a hard proposition. He seemed to think himself a Goliath, and would certainly put up a stiff fight on an emergency. "I'd rather see him come back with any three men than the old Colonel," Binnhart concluded ruefully.

This was the hour of the night when a mist began

to rise, and the orange-tinted lights from the steamer's cabin glimmered faintly through the haze. Binnhart became apprehensive that he might not discern the tiny craft in the midst of the great river, struggling across its intricate braided currents, and thus the stranger return unaware, or perhaps give him the slip altogether. He rose and took his way down the successive terraces to the verge of the water. He must needs have heed not to walk into the river, for silent as the grave it flowed through the deep gorge of its channel, and but for some undiscriminated sense of motion in the dark landscape one might never know it was there.

Long, long he stood at gaze, watching in the direction of the bar, his ear keenly attentive, aware that he could hear from far the slightest impact of a paddle on that silent surface. But the wind was rising now; the mists, affrighted, spread their tenuous white wings and flitted away. Presently there lay visible before him, vaguely illumined by the light of a clouded moon, the vast spread of the tossing turmoils of the sky, the dark borders of the opposite bank, the swift swirling of the great river, and the white structure of the steamboat, rising dimly into the air on the sand-bar. Her lights were faint now, lowered for the night; the vague clanking of the dynamo came athwart the currents; still the surface of the waters showed no gliding craft, and listen as he might he heard no measured dip of paddle.

Once more he betook himself back to the shack and found Connover and Jorrocks seated on the outer stair. They evidently had no faith in the adage of honor among thieves, and albeit they had alternately enjoyed the refreshment of a nap in the

bunks of the cabin one remained always vigilant as to the movements of Binnhart. As the night wore on and naught was developed both had taken up a position on the outer stair and alertly awaited the crisis.

Dan Berridge and his father were but poor exemplifications of the sybarite, but the paramount instincts of self-indulgence overpowered their hope of loot, and their doubt of the fair-dealing of their co-conspirators, and in their respective bunks they snored as noisily as if in the sleep of the just.

Jessy Jane alone took note of the fact that, but for their disclosure of the somnolent talk of the stranger, the others would have known naught of the possibility of the discovery of the hidden valuables at Duciehurst and she resented the chance that they would profit to the exclusion of her and hers. She remained in the dark in the back room of the little cabin, but up and dressed, now and again listening intently for any stir of movement or sound of voices. When she heard the heavy tread of Jorrocks and Connover tramping to the outer stair as they relieved each other's watch, she would set the communicating door ajar to thrust in her tousled red head to spy upon their motions, withdrawing it swiftly. Now she perceived through the dim vista of the room the square face of Jorrocks against the gloom of the night, looking at her with calculating, narrowing eyes, evidently appreciating the full significance of her espionage, and, beyond still, a vague shadowy outline which she recognized as Jasper Binnhart's profile. She closed the door with a bang, partly in pettishness and partly through embarrassment, at the moment that Binnhart grew

stiff and rigid, motionless in excitement. He had sighted a canoe down the river, which was shining in a rift of the clouds, a mile, nay, two, below the landing for which it was bound. Thus she did not see his wild, silent gesture of discovery, his hand thrown high into the air. Its muscles became informed with a mandatory impulse as he beckoned to Jorrocks and Connover to follow and set forth in a dead run for the water's side.

A skiff was lying there scarcely discernible in the vague light. It belonged to the shanty-boater, and into it the owner threw himself, grasping the oars, the other two with less practiced feet tumbled into the space left available, and the craft shot out from the land under the swift, strong strokes of the shanty-boater, rowing as if for a purse. There was a belt of pallor along the horizon. A sense of dreary wistfulness, of sadness, lay on the land, coming reluctantly into view. The clouds hung low and menacing, although the wind still was high. The dawn was near, or even the practiced eyes of the river pirates might not have distinguished the dug-out, seeking to cross the great expanse, yet being carried by the strong current further and further down the river from its objective point.

"See her now?" asked Jorrocks, resolutely rowing and never turning his head.

"Well out todes mid-stream," replied Binnhart. "Nigh to swampin', too. Git a move on ye, Jorrocks, git a move on ye."

After a contemplative moment he suddenly threw himself on another pair of oars and the combined strength of the two men sent the light boat shooting like an arrow down the surface of the river

upon the craft, evidently having shipped water and beginning to welter dangerously, showing a tendency to capsize, the trick so frequently practiced by the faithless dug-out.

"Hello, sport!" called out Binnhart, as soon as he was within earshot. "You'll go to the bottom in three minutes unless you can swim agin the Mississippi current better than I can. Will you have a lift?"

The stranger's exhausted face showed ghastly white in the dull, slow light. His wide, dark eyes were wild and suspicious. There was something in their expression that sent a chill coursing down the spine of the impressionable Connover, his shaken, exacerbated nerves all on edge from his constant potations, as well as from the excitements of this experience and the strain of his long vigil. The stranger scanned them successively, keeping the canoe in place by an occasional dip of the paddle. It might seem as if he debated the alternative—Davy Jones's locker or a place among these boatmen. When he spoke his reserved gentlemanly tone struck their attention.

"I shall be much obliged," he said, with grave and distant courtesy, evidently recognizing a vast gulf between their station and his.

"Move out of the gentleman's way, Connover," said Binnhart, quickly. For this was a gentleman, however water-soaked, however queer of conduct, whatever project he might have in view.

After securing the dug-out as a tow, Binnhart seated himself opposite the stranger, who was given the place of honor in the stern.

"Nothin' meaner afloat than a dug-out," Binn-

hart remarked, keenly watching the face of his guest, whose lineaments became momently more distinct as the dull dawn grew into a dreary day. "Though to be sure a dug-out ain't used commonly for crossing the river, jes' for scoutin' about the banks, and in the bayous, and lakes."

"I am not accustomed to its use," the stranger replied.

"You come mighty nigh swampin', an' that's a fact, though you couldn't have got nothin' better at Berridge's, an' I s'pose your business with Colonel Kenwynton on the *Cherokee Rose* wouldn't wait."

"Colonel Kenwynton!" cried the gentleman, with a strange sharpness. "How do you know I had business with Colonel Kenwynton?"

"No offense, sir. You spoke of it at Berridge's. He is a leaky-mouthed old chap. What goes in at his ears comes out of his jaws."

"I spoke of it? *I* spoke of it?" repeated the stranger. His voice was keyed to the cadences of despair. The modulation of those dying falls was scarcely intelligible to Binnhart; he could not have interpreted them nor even the impression they made upon his mind. But some undiscriminated faculty appraised their true intendment and on it fashioned his course. Once more he looked keenly at the stranger's face, while the gentleman gazed with deep reflectiveness at the swift waters so near at hand racing by on either side.

"Where shall we set you ashore, sir?" Binnhart asked with respectful urbanity.

Ah, here was evidently a dilemma. Berridge's hut was now far up stream, since the brawny practiced arms of Jorrocks had steadily continued to

row the skiff down and down the current, which of itself would have been ample motive power for a swift transit. An expression of despondency crossed the stranger's face.

"I should have noticed earlier," he said. "I had intended to return to Berridge's, but I cannot ask you to go so far out of your way against the current. Just set me ashore at the nearest practicable point and I can walk back."

"All 'ight, sir. Duciehurst is the nearest safe landing, the bank is bluff an' caving above."

Binnhart was quick to note as the word was spoken the change of expression and a sudden sharp gasp that was not unlike a snap, so did the muscles evade control.

"You are acquainted with the old mansion, sir, spoke of it bein' part of your business with Colonel Kenwynton to git the hidden money an' papers an' vallybles—take care, Colty, he'll fall out of the boat!"

For Captain Treherne, his eyes distended, his lower jaw fallen, his face livid, had risen in the boat and stood tottering in the unsteady craft, staring aghast and dumfounded at Binnhart. "I spoke of that? I told you that?"

"No, sir, but you told Berridge, Josh, the old man."

"You lie, you infamous liar! What, *I* publish abroad the secret that I have kept through thick and thin, till after forty years of acute mania I may right the wrong and establish the title. Oh, my God!" he broke forth shrilly, "am I raving now? Is this a species of hallucination, obsession," he waved his wild hands toward sky, and woods, and

sinister, silent river, "or, worse still, is it stern fact and have I betrayed my sacred trust at last?"

"He'll turn this boat upside down," the shanty-boater in a low voice warned the others.

"'Liar' is a toler'ble stiff word for me to have to take off 'n you, Mister," said Binnhart, with affected gruffness, for his affiliations with the truth were not so close as to cause him to actually resent an accusation of divagation. "It ain't my fault if you got absent-minded an' told Berridge that the vallybles are hid in a pillar or a pilaster," he broke off abruptly.

A shrill scream rent the air. It seemed for one moment as if Captain Treherne himself had made a discovery, so elated were his eyes, so triumphant was his face, changed almost out of recognition in the moment. Agitated as he was he had lost his balance and was swaying to and fro as if he might pitch head-foremost into the river.

"If you don't want the whole water-side popila-  
tion rowing out here to see what's the matter aboard  
you had better make him stop that n'ise," the shanty-  
boater urged. "Gag him. Take his handhercher,  
or his hat," he recommended, still swiftly rowing.

The dull, purplish twilight of the slow-coming day gave little token of stir amongst the few scattered inhabitants of the riverside within earshot; cottonpickers are never in the field till the sun has dried the dew from the plant, but Jorrocks was mindful of the fact that there are barnyard duties in an agricultural community requiring early rising; cows are to be milked, horses fed and watered, and any bucolic errand might bring to the bank an inquisitive interest in these weird cries ringing from

shore to shore in an intensity of agonized emotion. The suggestion of Jorrocks was acted upon instantly. Binnhart roughly knocked the hat from Captain Treherne's head, crushed it into a stiff, shapeless mass, thrust it between his jaws, attempting to secure it with his large linen handkerchief, despite his strenuous resistance. The struggle was fierce, and the miscreants were dismayed by the strength the victim put forth. The two could scarcely hold him; over and again he shook off both Binnhart and Connover. The shanty-boater had great ado even with his practiced skill to keep the skiff from overturning altogether, as it listed from side to side as the weight of the combatants shifted. The stranger fought with a sort of frenzy, striking, kicking, butting with his head, even biting with his strong snapping jaws.

"He is like a maniac," cried Binnhart, in amaze, and once more that awful cry rang upon the air, shrill, wild, freighted with demoniacal bursts of laughter, yet with an intonation more pathetic than tears.

Not until Jorrocks shipped his oars and, leaning forward, caught Treherne's feet, throwing him on his back in the bottom of the boat, was the gag again introduced into his mouth, to be promptly and dexterously ejected as he sought to rise. Again was the semi-nautical skill of the shanty-boater of avail. A crafty knot in a rope's end and the stranger's arms were pinioned to his side, and while the gag was secured the surplusage of the cord was bound again and again about his legs till he was helpless, able neither to move nor to speak. Only his wild eyes

expressed his indomitable courage, his sense of affronted dignity, his resentful fury.

"I do declar' I'm minded to spit in his face," exclaimed Binnhart, vindictively, as panting and breathless, he towered above his victim, lying at his feet.

"Better not!" the shanty-boater admonished the blacksmith. Then, in a lower voice: "You fool you, we depend on his good will to show us the place where the swag is hid."

"Tend to your own biz," roughly replied Binnhart. "Look where your boat is driftin'. Bound for Vicksburg, ain't ye?"

For, left to its own devices when the oarsman had gone to the aid of his comrades, the skiff had been carried by the swift current far down the stream and toward the bank, so close, indeed, that Binnhart apprehended its grounding. He had not an acquaintance with the river front equal to the practical knowledge of the shanty-boater, whose peregrinations made him the familiar of every bogue and bight, of every bar and tow-head for a hundred miles or more.

"Look what's ahead of your blunt pig-snout, an' maybe ye'll have sense enough to follow it," Jor-rocks retorted.

For a great looming structure had appeared on the bank in the murky atmosphere, that was not so shadowy as night, yet in its obscurity could hardly assume to be day. An imposing mansion of three stories, with a massive cornice and commodious wings, stood well back on the shelving terraces. Woods on either hand pressed close about and many of the trees being magnolias and of coniferous vari-

ties foreign to the region, the foliage was dense despite the season, and gave the entourage a singular, sinister sense of deep seclusion. In the dim light one could hardly discern that there was no glass in the windows, but the black, gaping intervals intimated somehow vacancy and ruin, and Binnhart was quick to notice the dozen great pillars rising to the floor of the third story and supporting the roof of the long broad portico. Then he gave no further attention to the unwonted surroundings, but fixed his gaze on the face of their prisoner as his helpless bulk was lifted from the boat by the three. He was of no great weight and they bore him easily enough, inert and motionless, along the broad broken stone pavement to the deserted ruin.

A ready interpretation had Binnhart, a keen intuition. The native endowment might have wrought him good service in a better field. As it was it had been the pivotal faculty on which had turned with every wind of opportunity the nefarious successes that the thieves had achieved. He now watched the glimmer of recognition in Captain Treherne's eyes as he, too, gazed breathlessly with intent interest at the mansion, despite his bound and gagged situation. He even made shift to turn his head that he might fix his eyes on the eastern side. Only to the east he looked, and always. Binnhart felt a bounding pulse of prideful discovery that in the east the treasure was hidden, in an eastern pilaster of the portico.

He was not familiar with the meaning of the architectural term, but just what a "pilaster" was he would know before he was an hour older, he swore to himself, if there was a carpenter or builder

awake in the little town of Caxton where his shop was located and where he must needs repair for tools. There he would learn this all-significant fact, for that there was treasure hidden at Duciehurst all the country-side had been aware for forty years —the question was, where?

They bore Captain Treherne through half a dozen darkling rooms, showing as yet scant illumination from the slow coming day. The windows gave upon a gray nullity outside, and even the size and condition of the bare, echoing apartments could not be ascertained by the prisoner's searching gaze as he was laid down on the floor at full length, watching the preparations of his captors for their temporary departure. One of them would remain, as he was assured by Binnhart, who had again adopted a tone of deference suited to the evident station and culture of the victim. Connover would stay and see to it that he was not molested in any manner whatever during the short absence of the others. Binnhart, making his words as few as possible, took his leave and once more in the boat Jorrocks pulled down the river with every pulse of energy he could command.

Captain Treherne had spent forty years of his life in an insane asylum, but the experience had not bereft him in this lucid interval of the appreciation of certain fundamental facts of human nature. He realized that although he could not use his hands, Connover was in no wise restricted. Perhaps the offer of the funds in his pocket might compass his release if he could find means to intimate this delicate proposition. Treherne waited till he heard the shuffling gait of Jorrocks and the swift assured step

of Binnhart die away in the distance before he would seek to communicate his desire by means of winks and such significant grimaces as the gag would permit. Before the others were clear of the house Connover had come and stood beside him gazing down at him with a sort of vacant curiosity on his weak, dissipated face, unmeaning and without intention. But he immediately turned away, and, repairing to a long hall hard by, began to tramp idly back and forth to while away the time of waiting.

It was likely to be a considerable time, he began to reflect discontentedly, and he had no particular liking for his commission. The other fellows would get their feed in Caxton, he argued. Jorrocks would not go without his breakfast for the United States Treasury. They would also get drinks, good and plenty. At this thought he took an empty flask from his pocket and lugubriously smelled it. He was a fool, he said to himself, and perhaps that was the only true word he had spoken that day. But, in his opinion, it applied specifically to his consent to remain here, as if he, too, were bound and gagged.

Once more he sniffed the departed delights of the empty flask. Suddenly Captain Treherne heard no more the regular impact of his steps as he tramped the long length of the vacant hall. There was a livery stable at a way-station of the railroad some eight miles distant, a goodish tramp on an empty stomach, but the odor of the flask endued him "with the strength of ten." He was known there as an ex-jockey of some success, he was appreciated after a fashion by its employees; he could count on their hospitality and conviviality, and perhaps borrowing a rig he could return before Binnhart and Jorrocks

would be here accoutered with their tools. The prisoner could not report his defection, even when liberated, for he could not know where in that great building he had seen fit to bestow himself to enjoy, perchance, what he was pleased to call, "a nap of sleep."

Thus silence as of the tomb settled on the deserted building. The shades of night gradually wore away and the pale gray light of a sunless and melancholy day pervaded the dreary vistas of the bare uninhabited ruin.

## CHAPTER V

IN his inexorable view of the sanctity of his promise Colonel Kenwynton had no impulse to confide the details of the revelation he had received or to take counsel thereon. Still, he could but look with an accession of interest at Adrian Ducie when he met him at the breakfast table, the passengers of the *Cherokee Rose* dallying over the meal, prolonging it to the utmost in the dearth of other interest or occupation.

Although Ducie seemed to have mustered the philosophy to ignore the serious aspects of this most irksome and dolorous detention, it had darkened all the horizon to Floyd-Rosney's exacting and censorious mood. "I can't imagine, Captain, how you should not have been on the lookout for the formation of an obstruction capable of grounding the boat," was his cheerful matutinal greeting.

"Oh, Miss Dean says he knew it was there all the time, and only wished to entertain us," his wife interposed, with a view of toning down her lord's displeasure, but her sarcastic chin was in the air, and her clipped, quick enunciation gave token only of one of her ironic pleasantries.

"Well, I intend to eat him out of house and home while I am about it," said Ducie, with an affectation of roughness. "This table is not run *à la carte*. You can't charge more than the passage-money,

Captain, no matter how long we abide with you in this pleasance of a sand-bar—and I really think, waiter, I can get away with the other wing of that fried chicken."

"You think you can get away; *can* you?" Mrs. Floyd-Rosney sneered.

The queer little roughness he affected was incongruous with the delicate elegance of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's presence. The polish of his own appearance and ordinary manner warranted it as little, and the contrariety of his mental attitude was like that of a bad child "showing off" in the reverse of expectation or desire. Between the heavy sulking of her husband in the troubrous *contretemps* of the detention of the boat, and the peculiar tone that Adrian Ducie had taken, in which, however, offense was at once untenable and inexplicable, it might seem that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had much ado to preserve her airy placidity and maintain the poise of the delicate irony of her manner. This became more practicable when Ducie's attention was diverted to a little girl of twelve who had boarded the packet with her father at the landing of a fashionable suburban school some distance up the river, evidently designing to spend the week-end at home. She was a bouncing little girl, with liquid black eyes, and dark red hair, long and abundant, plaited on either side of her head and tied up with black ribbon bows of preposterously wide loops. While she was as noisy and as active as a boy, she was evidently constantly beset with the realization that her lot in life was of feminine restrictions, and miserably repented of every alert caper. Her memory, however, was short, as short, one might say, as her

very abbreviated skirts, and the monition of the staid gait, appropriate to her sex, always struck her after the fantastic gallopade or muscular skip on her long, handsome, black-stockinged legs, and never by any chance earlier. She had a most Briarean and centipedal consciousness in Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's presence, which she instinctively appraised as critical, and she was covered with confusion as she came flustering out of her stateroom to the breakfast table to realize that she had banged the door behind her. By way of disposing of one superfluous foot at least she crooked her leg deftly at the knee, placed its foot in the chair and sat down upon it, turning scarlet as she did so, realizing all too late that the maneuver was perfectly obvious, and wondering what Mrs. Floyd-Rosney must think of a girl who sat on her foot. For the opinion of the score of other persons at the tables she had not a thought or a care, doubtless relying on their good nature to condone the attitude, curiously affected and prized by persons of her age and sex. An agile twist had got the foot down to the floor again, and now with restored composure and rebounding spirits her gushing loquacity was reasserted, and she was exchanging matutinal greetings with her traveling companions; her father, a tall, lean, quiet man, who had marked her entrance with raised eyebrows and a concerned air, having resumed his talk on the tariff with his next neighbor at table.

"Have compassion on our dullness, Miss Marjorie," said Adrian Ducie, suavely smiling at her from across the board. In his contrariety he seemed to have divined Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's covert disapproval and made a point of according his own favor.

Marjorie's heart, however, was in no danger from his fascinations. To her he seemed a man well advanced in years, quite an old bachelor, indeed. "Tell us your dreams."

"Dreams? oh, mercy!" How often had she been warned against rising inflections and interjections? "My dreams are all mixed up. I don't know now what they were."

"I will disentangle them for you," he said, blandly; then in parenthesis to the waiter, "Give the cook my compliments and tell him to send up another omelette, which I will share with Miss Ashley."

"Oh, I don't like eggs," Marjorie blurted out, then stopped short. How often had she been admonished never to say at table that she disliked any article of diet. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, she was sure, must have noticed that lapse.

"Then I will eat it all by myself—mark me now, Captain! While awaiting its construction I will tell your dreams, and interpret their mystery."

"Oh, oh," gurgled Marjorie. What a nice old man was this Mr. Adrian Ducie! Her blithe young eyes were liquid and brilliant with expectation.

"You dreamed that you and I went hunting, with some others who don't matter and who shall be nameless," he glanced slightly up and down the row of passengers at the table. "We went ashore in the yawl, and I borrowed the Captain's rifle, and—"

"No, you didn't," said the Captain, from the next table, "for I haven't got one."

"You don't mean it?" said Ducie, stopping short. "Then what would become of us if pirates should

board this gallant craft of ours? Depend wholly on the pistol pockets of the passengers?"

"Oh, oh, Mr. Ducie," cried Marjorie, quite losing her hold on herself, "you are so funny!"

"Thank you, oh, very much, I can be funnier than that when I try."

Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's unseeing eyes perceived no interest apparently in this conversation. Now and then, with an absorbed air, she recurred to her tea and toast as if naught were going forward, while her husband ate his breakfast as silently and with as much gruff concentration as a hound with a bone.

Their persistent expression of a lack of interest seemed to stimulate Mr. Ducie to a further absorption of the attention of the company. "Are there really no shot-guns, no fowling-pieces aboard, nothing to shoot with deadlier than the darts of Miss Marjorie's bright eyes?"

"Oh, oh," she squealed, enchanted at this turn, and laid down her knife and fork to put her hands before her lips apparently to suppress a series of similar shrillnesses, for this old man's funniness was of a most captivating order.

"I notice that there is a swamper's cabin over there on the bank; I'll bet he has got a rifle; but what is the nearest plantation house, Captain? Mansion, I should say," he corrected the phrase with the satiric flout of the younger generation at the mannerisms of yore.

The Captain seemed to resent it. "You may very safely call it a 'mansion,' sir, it has twenty-five rooms, exclusive of ball-room, billiard-room, picture-gallery, and the domestic offices, kitchen, laundry, dairy, and quarters for servants, and so forth.

The Duciehurst plantation-house is the nearest mansion. It is really a ruin, now, and uninhabited, I suppose, but it was good enough in its day."

A sudden portentous gravity smote the countenance of Adrian Ducie. Although the risible muscles and ligaments still held the laughing contour, all the mirth was gone out of it. His face was as if stricken into stone, as if he had suddenly beheld the Gorgon Head of trouble. The change was so marked, so momentous, that Colonel Kenwynton, forgetting for the moment whence came the association of ideas, suddenly asked:

"You have the same name as the former owner, Mr. Ducie, though I suppose you don't hold the title to the mansion?"

"Oh, I hold the title fast enough," replied Ducie, with his wonted off-hand manner, "though it's like my 'title to a mansion in the skies,' I can't read it clear."

Floyd-Rosney's mood was already lowering enough, but for some reason, not immediately apparent, his averse discontent was fomented by the change of the subject. He paused with his tea-cup poised in his hand. His deep voice weighed more heavily than usual on the silence.

"It seems to me a mis-statement to say that you have a title to the property,—a title is a right. There are certainly some forty years' adverse possession against any outstanding claim, of which I have never heard."

Ducie was eyeing Floyd-Rosney with a look at once affronted and amazed. "And where do you derive your information as to my title to Duciehurst?"

"I have no information as to your *title* to Duciehurst, which is the reason that I could not remain silent when such title was asserted, though the discussion cannot be edifying to this goodly company." He waved his hand at the rows of breakfasting passengers with an unmirthful smile and his courtesy was so perfunctory as obviously to have no root. "The title is mine, it comes to me within the year from the will of my Uncle Horace Carriton, who held it for forty years. But," with his sour, condescending smile at the company, "the courts and not the breakfast table are the proper place to assert a right that is not barred by the lapse of time."

"The remedy may be barred, but not the right," Ducie retorted angrily.

Captain Disnett's voice sounded with pacifying intonations. He did not seek to change the subject but to steer it clear of breakers. "I never could understand why Mr. Carriton let the old mansion go to wreck and ruin, fine old place as there is on the river. Though he rented out the lands the house has always remained untenanted."

Mr. Floyd-Rosney's dignity was enhanced by the composure which he found it possible to maintain in this nettling discussion. "The house was much injured by the occupancy of guerillas and military marauders during the Civil War," he rejoined. "After it came into the possession of my uncle, when peace was restored, it was left vacant from necessity. My uncle, who was a non-resident,—lived in Tennessee,—would not cut up the plantation into small holdings; many tenants make much mischief, so he preferred to lease the entire place to some man of moderate means for a term of years, as no

person of fortune appeared as a purchaser of the house, which it would cost largely to restore. None of the successive lessees was able or willing to furnish or maintain the mansion in a style suitable to its pretensions, yet they were too proud to live in a corner of it like a mouse in a hole. Such a man would prefer to live in a neighboring villa or cottage while farming the lands as better suited to his comfort and credit than that vacant wilderness of architecture."

"Strange visitors it must have at odd times," meditated the Captain. "Once in a while in our runs I have seen lights flitting about there at night, quite distinct from the pilot-house. And in wintry weather a gleam shows far over the snow."

"Tramps, gipsies, river-pirates, I suppose," suggested Coloned Kenwynton.

Ducie was glowering down at his spoon as he turned it aimlessly in his empty cup, a deep red flush on his cheek and his eyes on fire.

"Yes, yes. There is a tradition of hidden treasure at Duciehurst, one of the wild riverside stories as old as the hills," said the Captain, "and I suppose the water-rats, and the shanty-boaters, and the river-pirates all take turns in hunting for it when fuel and shelter get scarce, and the pot boils slow, and work goes hard with the lazy cattle."

For one moment Colonel Kenwynton's head was in a whirl. Had he dreamed this thing, this story of family jewels and important papers stowed in a knapsack and hidden on Duciehurst plantation? So sudden was the confirmation of the war-time legend, so hard it came on the revelation of last night in the turbulent elements on the verge of the sand-bar that

it scarcely seemed fact. He had not had time to think it over, to canvass the strange chance in his mind. Treherne had declared that for forty years he had been an inmate of an insane asylum. Without analyzing his own mental processes Colonel Kenwynton was aware that he had taken it for granted that the story was a vain fabrication of half-distraught faculties, an illusion, a part of the unreasoning adventure that had summoned him forth from his bed in the midnight to stand knee-deep in the marsh to hear a recital of baffled rights and hidden treasure. In all charity and candor he had begun to wonder that Hugh Treherne should find himself now beyond the bounds of detention. In these corroborative developments, however, his opinion veered and he made a plunge at further elucidation of the mystery.

"Mr. Ducie, I should be glad to know what relation you are to Lieutenant Archibald Ducie, who died of typhoid in a hospital in Vicksburg during the war?"

Ducie answered in a single word, "Nephew."

"Then you are George Blewitt Ducie's grandson."

"Grandson," monosyllabic as before.

The old man thought himself a strategist of deep, elusive craft. For the sake of his friend, Captain Treherne, and his plaintive disability; for the sake of the implied trust accepted in the fact that he had received this confidence, he must seek to know the truth while he screened the motive. "Well, since these old world clavers are mighty interesting to an ancient fossil such as I am,—I must look backward, having, you know, no future in view,—wasn't

there some talk of a lost document, a deed of trust missing, mislaid,—what was it about—a Duciehurst mortgage?"

"A *release* of a mortgage," replied Ducie, his words coming with the impetus and fury of hot shot. "The lost paper was a release of a mortgage, a quit-claim, signed and witnessed, but not registered. There were no facilities at the time to record legal papers, not a court nor a clerk's office open in the country, which was filled with contending armies."

Mr. Floyd-Rosney had finished his breakfast and seemed about to rise. The vexation of this discussion was beyond endurance to a proud and pompous man. But it was not his temperament to give back one inch. He stood his ground and presently he began to affect indifference to the situation, placing an elbow on the table and looking with his imperious composure first at one speaker and then at the other. He was not so absorbed, however, that he did not note how his wife loitered over the waffles before her, spinning out the details of the meal that no point of the conversation might escape her.

"I remember now, I remember," said Colonel Kenwynton, nodding his white head. "It was claimed that the mortgage was lifted, the debt being paid in gold, and that a formal release was executed here in Mississippi and delivered with the original paper, though not noted in the instrument of registration."

"There being no courts in operation," interpolated Ducie, obviously as restive as a fiery horse.

"And by reason of the intervention of the Federal lines and the sudden deaths of the two principals to the transaction the promissory notes, thus

secured on the plantation, were not returned to the maker, but remained in Tennessee, where Mr. Carroll Carriton had deposited them in a bank for safe-keeping."

"Is this a fairy-story, Colonel Kenwynton?" sneered Floyd-Rosney, his patience wearing thin under the strain upon it, and beginning to deprecate and doubt the effect on his wife.

"No, it is a story of the evil genii," said Ducie, significantly.

"You mean War and Confusion, and Loss," said Floyd-Rosney, in bland interpretation, and apparently in excellent temper. "They are, indeed, the evil genii. But you will please to observe, Colonel Kenwynton, that the executors of the mortgagee, Mr. Carroll Carriton, could not accept this unsupported representation of an executed release of the mortgage. The executors had the registered mortgage, with no marginal notation of its satisfaction, and they had the promissory notes. They sued the estate of George Blewitt Ducie on the promissory notes and foreclosed on Duciehurst."

"I remember, I remember," said Colonel Kenwynton, "and although at the period when the mortgage was made it was for a sum inconsiderable in comparison with the value of the property Duciehurst went under the hammer in the collapsed financial conditions subsequent to the war for less than the amount of the original indebtedness, plantations being a drug on the market, and the executors of the mortgagee bought it in for the Carriton estate."

"The executors proceeded throughout under the sanction of the court," said Floyd-Rosney. "Of course, I would have the utmost sensitiveness to the

position of an interloper or usurper, but in this instance there can be no such suggestion. No papers could be produced by the defendant, and a wild legend of the loss of such documents could not withstand the scrutiny of even the least cautious and strict chancellor. The fact that Carroll Carriton happened to be in Mississippi at that time and that George Blewitt Ducie was known to have aggregated a considerable sum in gold by a successful blockade-running scheme of selling cotton in Liverpool was dwelt upon by the counsel for the Ducie heir as corroborative evidence that the two principals to the transaction met expressly to lift the incumbrance, but this contention was not admitted by the court."

He paused for a moment. Then he turned directly upon Ducie. "While I should be sorry, Mr. Ducie, if you should grudge me my rightful holding, I observe that your brother does not share your view. He acquiesced in the existing status by renting certain of these lands while in my uncle's possession before I succeeded under the will."

"By no means, by no means," cried Ducie, furiously. "He is no tenant of yours. He only purchased the standing crop of cotton from your uncle's tenant, who was obliged to leave the country for a time—shot a man. But, as I understand it, you could not plead that acquiescence, even if it existed, in the event that the release could be found,—take advantage of your own tort in the foreclosure of a mortgage duly paid."

"Oh, if you talk of 'torts,' this 'knowledge is too excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it.'" Floyd-Rosney retorted, lightly.

His wife still held her fork in her hand, but he significantly placed her finger-bowl beside her plate. Then he rose. "Any rights that you can prove to my estate of Duciehurst, Mr. Ducie, will be gladly conceded by me. Kindly remember that, if you please."

His wife was constrained to rise and he stood aside with a bow to let her pass first down the restricted space between the tables and the wall. They were out on the guards when she lifted her eyes to his and laid her hand on his arm.

"Why did you never tell me that the property which has lately come to you really belongs to the Duccies?"

He stared down at her, too astonished to be angry.

"Why? Because it is a lie. The Duccies have not a vestige of a right to it."

"Oh, no, no. The Duccies would never seek to maintain a lie. Only they can't substantiate their claim on account of the disastrous chances of war."

She put her hands before her face and shook her head. When she looked up again there were vague blue circles beneath her eyes. The nervous stress of the incident and some unformulated association with the idea were obviously bearing on her heavily.

"It seems to me that we ought not to keep it," she faltered.

"Keep it!" he thundered. "Why, we, that is our predecessors, have owned it for the last forty years, without a question. Why, Paula, are you crazy? The whole affair went through the courts forty years ago. '*Ought not to keep it!*' The Ducie heir, this man's father, who was then a minor, had not a

scrap of paper nor one material witness, only the general understanding in the country that as Carroll Carriton happened to be in Mississippi at the time, and George Blewitt Ducie had a lot of specie from running his cotton through the blockade to England, he paid off the mortgage in gold. But that was mere hearsay, chiefly rumor of the gabble of the men who, it was claimed, had witnessed the execution of the quit-claim, and who took occasion to die immediately thereafter."

"There is some inherent coercive evidence, to my mind, of the truth of those circumstances," she declared. "It is too hard that the Duccies should have paid the money owed on the mortgage and then lose the place by foreclosure, and, oh, for less than the amount of the original debt."

"But, Paula, can't you see there is not a grain of proof that they ever paid the money? How, when, where? We held the promissory notes and the registered deed of trust and the court did not even take the matter under advisement."

"But you know the confusion of the times,—no courts of record, no mail facilities or means of communication."

"Much exaggerated, I believe. But at all events we had the promissory notes and the registered mortgage and they had their cock-and-bull story."

"Oh, I should like to give it back,—it would be so noble of you. I cannot bear that we should own what the Duccies claim is theirs, and I feel sure that if it is not theirs in law it is by every moral sanction. And for such a poor price!—to lose the whole estate for the little amount, comparatively, of the debt!"

It is too sharp a bargain for us. How much was the amount for which the executors bought it in?"

His face changed and he did not answer. It had not been a pleasant morning, and his imperious temper had been greatly strained. "I remember," he said, satirically, losing his self-control at last, "that you once entertained a tender interest in one of these Messieurs Ducie. I must say that I did not expect it to last so long or to go so far,—to propose to denude me of my very own, one of the finest properties in Mississippi, and vest him with it!"

Her face flushed. Her eyes flashed. "You have broken your promise! You have broken your promise!" She looked so vehement, so affronted, so earnest, that her anger tamed him for a moment.

"It was inadvertent, dear. The circumstances forced it."

"It was solemnly agreed between us that we would never mention this man, never remember that he existed. When I promised to marry you I told you frankly that I had been engaged to him, and had never a thought, a hope, a wish, but that I might marry him, until I met you."

"I know, dear, I remember." His warm hand closed down on her trembling fingers that she had laid on the railing of the guards as if for support.

"It is a matter of pride with me. I have no idea that I should feel so about it if it were any one else. But, of course, I know that he must reproach me for my duplicity, my inconstancy—"

"But you do not reproach yourself," with a quick, searching glance.

"No, no, I was not inconstant. Only then I had not met you. But I have caused him unhappiness,

and a sort of humiliation among his friends, who consider that I threw him over at the last minute, and I cannot bear to own anything that he accounts his. I don't want *his* land. I don't want *his* house. I wish you would deed it all back to him.

"You tiresome little dunce!" he exclaimed, laughing. "It is one of the largest plantations in acreage, cleared and tillable, in Mississippi, and I really should not like to say how much it is worth, especially now with the price of cotton on the bounce. People would think I was crazy if I did such a mad thing as to deed it back. I should be unfitted for any part in the business world. No one would trust me for a moment. And apart from my own interest, consider our son. What would he think of me, of you, when he comes to man's estate, if we should alienate for a whim that fine property, of which he might one day stand in dire need. Change is the order of the times. Edward Floyd-Rosney, Junior, may not have a walk over the course as his father did."

"But, Edward, we are rich—"

"And so would the Duccies be, by hook or by crook, if they knew what is comfortable." He laughed prosperously. He was tired of the subject, and was turning away as he drew forth his cigar-case. He was good to himself, and fostered his taste for personal luxury, even in every minute manner that would not be ridiculously obtrusive as against the canons of good taste. The ring on the third finger of his left hand might seem, to the casual glance of the uninitiated, the ordinary seal so much affected, but a connoisseur would discern in it a priceless intaglio. The match-box which he held

as he walked away along the guards was of solid gold, richly chased. His clothes were the masterpieces of a London tailor of the first order, but so decorous and inconspicuous in their fine simplicity that but for their enhancement of his admirable figure and grace of movement their quality and cost might have passed unnoticed.

Paula looked after him with an intent and troubled gaze, her heart pulsing tumultuously, her brain on fire. It would never have been within her spiritual compass to make a conscious sacrifice of self for a point of ethics. She could not have relinquished aught that she craved, or that was significant in its effects. To own Duciehurst would make no item of difference in the luxury of their life,—to give it up could in no way reduce their consequence or splendor of appointment. To her the acquisition of a hundred thousand dollars, more or less, signified naught in an estate of millions. They were rich, they had every desire of luxury or ostentation gratified,—what would they have more? But that this prosperity should be fostered, aggrandized by the loss of the man whom she had causelessly jilted, wounded her pride. It was peculiarly lacerating to her sensibilities that her husband should own Randal Ducie's ancestral estate, bought under the disastrous circumstances of a forced sale for a mere trifle of its value, and that she should be enriched by this almost thievish chance. She could not endure that it should be Randal Ducie at last from whom she should derive some part of the luxury which she had craved and for which she had bartered his love—that he should be bravely struggling on, bereft of his inheritance, in that sane

and simple sphere to which she had looked back last night as another and a native world, from which she was exiled to this realm of alien and flamboyant splendor, that suddenly had grown strangely garish and bitter to the taste as she contemplated it. What, indeed, did it signify to her?—She had no part, no choice in dispensing her husband's wealth. Everything was brought to her hand, regardless of her wish or volition, as if she were a puppet. Even her charities, her appropriate pose as a "lady bountiful," were not spontaneous. "I think you had better subscribe two hundred dollars to the refurnishing of the Old Woman's Home, Paula,—it is incumbent in your position," he would say, or "I made a contribution of five hundred in your name to the Children's Hospital,—it is expected that in your position you would do something." Her position—this made the exaction, not charity, not humanity, not generosity. But for the mention in the local journals the institutions of the city would never have known the lavish hand of one of its wealthiest and most prominent citizens. The money would, doubtless, do good even bestowed in this spirit, but the gift had no blessing for the giver, and she felt no glow of gratulation. Indeed, it was not a gift,—it was a tax paid on her position. More than once when she had advocated a donation on her own initiative he had promptly negatived the idea. "No use in that," he would declare, or the story of destitution and disaster was a "fake." These instances were not calculated to illustrate her position. She could not endure that it should levy its tribute on Randal Ducie's future, and she noted the sig-

nificant fact that always hitherto in mentioning the recent acquisition under his kinsman's will her husband had avoided the name of the estate which must have acquainted her with its former ownership.

## CHAPTER VI

THE weather had been vaguely misting all the dreary morning. Through a medium not rain, yet scarcely of the tenuity of vapor, Paula had gazed at the tawny flow of the swift river, the limited perspective of the banks, the tall looming of the forests, the slate-tinted sky, all dim and dull like a landscape in outline half smudged in with a stump. Suddenly this meager expression of the world beyond was withdrawn from contemplation. In the infinitely dull silence the fall of tentative drops on the hurricane deck was presently audible, and, all at once, there gushed forth from the low-hung clouds a tremendous down-pour of torrents beneath which the *Cherokee Rose* quivered. Paula turned quickly to the door of the saloon, which barely closed upon her before the guards were swept by floods of water.

The whole interior resounded with the beat of scurrying footsteps fleeing to shelter from this abrupt outbreak of the elements. Squads of the passengers, or, sometimes, a single fugitive came at intervals bursting into the saloon, gasping with the effects of surprise, and the effort at speed, laughing, flushed, agitated, recounting their narrow escapes from drenching or submergence. Two or three, indeed, had caught a ducking and were repairing to their staterooms for dry clothing. There was much sound of activity from the boiler deck as the roust-

abouts ran boisterously in and out of the rain, busied in protecting freight or in sheltering the few head of stock. The whole episode seemed charged with a cheerful sense of a jolt of the monotony.

A group of gentlemen who did not accompany ladies or who were not acquainted with those on board gathered in the forward cabin, but Ducie sat silent and listless in one of the arm-chairs in the saloon. Apparently, he desired to show the Floyd-Rosneys that he perceived no cause for embarrassment in their society and had no intention by withdrawing of ameliorating any awkwardness which his presence might occasion to them. There were very acceptable and cozy suggestions here. Hildegarde Dean sat at the piano with the two old soldiers beside her. The blind Major, who had a sweet tenor voice, albeit hopelessly attenuated now, some tones in the upper register cracked beyond repair in this world, would sing *sotto voce* a stanza of an old war song, utterly unknown to the girl of the present day, and Hildegarde, listening attentively, would improvise an accompaniment with refrain and *ritornello* in a vague tentative way like one recalling a lost memory. Suddenly she would throw up her head, her hands would crash out the confident *tema*, Colonel Kenwynton's powerful bass tones would boom forth, and the old blind Major's tremulous voice would soar on the wings of his enthusiasm, and his memories of the days of yore. Meantime, the girl's fresh young face, between the two old withered masks, would glow, the impersonation of kindly reverent youth and sweet peace and the sentiment of harmony.

It was pleasant to listen as song succeeded song.

Hildegarde's mother, soft-eyed, soft-mannered and graceful, still youthful of aspect, smiled in her sympathetic accord. Two or three of the more elderly passengers now and again recognized a strain that brought back a long vanished day. An old lady had taken out her fancy work and, as she plied her deft needle in the intricate pattern of the Battenberg, she nodded her head appreciatively to the rhythm of the music, and looked as if she had no special desire for her journey's end or a life beyond the sand-bar.

When the répertoire was exhausted and silence ensued the blank was presently filled by childish voices and laughter. Marjorie Ashley had begun to lead little Ned Floyd-Rosney about, introducing him to the various passengers disposed on the sofas and rocking-chairs of the saloon. In this scion of the Floyd-Rosney family seemed concentrated all its geniality. He was a whole-souled citizen and not only accepted courtesies with jovial urbanity but himself made advances. He had, indeed, something the tastes of a roisterer, and his father regarded, with open aversion, his disposition to carouse with his fellow-passengers. In his arrogant exclusiveness Floyd-Rosney revolted from the promiscuous attentions lavished on the child. He resented the intimacy which the affable infant had contracted with Marjorie Ashley, the two children rejoicing extremely when the old nurse had been summoned to her breakfast, thus consigning him in the interval to the care of his mother, and rendering him more accessible to the blandishments of his new friend. Floyd-Rosney felt that it was not appropriate that he should be thrust forward in this unseemly publicity thus scantily attended. It was the habit

of the family to travel in state, with Floyd-Rosney's valet, the lady's maid, a French bonne for the boy, in addition to the old colored nurse in whom Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had such confidence that she would not transfer the child wholly to other tendance. The occasion of this journey, however, did not admit of such a retinue. It was a visit of condolence which they had made to an aunt of Mr. Floyd-Rosney who had lost her son, formerly a very intimate friend of his own. She was an aged lady of limited means and a modest home. To descend upon a household of simple habitudes, already disorganized by recent illness and death, with a troop of strange servants to be cared for and accommodated, was manifestly so inappropriate that even so selfish a man as Floyd-Rosney did not entertain the idea, although his wife received in his querulous asides the full benefit of all the displeasure and inconvenience that he experienced from "having to jaunt about the world with no attendant but the child's nurse." The nurse, "Aunt Dorothy," as in the southern fashion she was respectfully called, had, perhaps, found company at breakfast agreeable to her of her own race and condition, and her absence was prolonged, which fact gave Marjorie Ashley the opportunity to make again the round of the group of passengers in the saloon, cajoling little Ned Floyd-Rosney to show them how he pronounced Miss Dean's Christian name. At every smiling effort she would burst into gurgles of redundant laughter, so funny did "Miff Milzepar" for "Miss Hildegarde" sound in her ears. He was conscious of a very humorous effect as he repeatedly made the attempt to pronounce this long word under Marjorie's urgency,

gazing up the while with his big blue eyes brimful of laughter, his carmine tinted lips ajar, showing his two rows of small white teeth, his pink cheeks continually fluctuating with a deeper flush, and his beguiling dimples on display. All the ladies and several of the gentlemen caught him up and kissed him ecstatically; so enticing a specimen of joyous, sweet-humored, fresh-faced childhood he presented. His mother's maternal pride glowed in her smile as she noted and graciously accepted the tribute, but Floyd-Rosney fumed indignant.

"Why don't you stop that, Paula?" he growled in her ear as he cast himself down on the sofa beside her. "All that kissing is dangerous."

"It has been going on since the beginning of the world, *accelerando*, as the opportunities multiply," she retorted with her satiric little fleer.

"Be pleased to notice that I am serious," he hissed in his gruff undertone.

"You can easily make me serious,—don't over-exert yourself," she said with a sub-current of indignation.

She deprecated this public display of his surly mood toward her. There is no woman, whether cherished or neglected, loving or indifferent, gifted or deficient, who does not arrogate in public the scepter in her husband's affections, who is not wounded to the quick by the slightest suggestion of reproof, or disparagement, or even the assertion of his independent sentiment when brought to the notice of others. This is something that finds, even in the most long-suffering wife, a keen new nerve to thrill with an undreamed of pain. Paula's cheek had flushed, her eyes were hot and excited,—indeed,

she did not lift them. She could not brook the indignity that the coterie, most of all, Adrian Ducie, should see her husband at her side with a stern and corrugated brow, whispering in her ear his angry rebukes, commands, comments,—who could know what he might have to say to her with that furious face and through his set teeth. The situation was intolerable; her pride groped for a means of escape.

Then she did a thing that she felt afterward she could never have done had she not in that moment unconsciously ceased to love her husband. She shielded him no more as heretofore. She did not sacrifice herself, as was her custom in a thousand small preferences. She did not assume his whim that he might be satisfied, yet incur no responsibility or ridicule. On the contrary, she led the laugh,—she delivered him, bound hand and foot, to the scoffer.

She suddenly rose, and, with her graceful, willowy gait, walked conspicuously down the middle of the saloon. "Ladies and gentlemen, fellow travelers and companions in misery," she said, swaying forward in an exaggerated bow, "the heir to the throne must not be kissed. Mr. Floyd-Rosney is a victim of the theory of osculatory microbes. You can only be permitted to taste how sweet the baby is through his honeyed words and his dulcet laughter. Why, he might catch a tobacco-bug from these human smoke-stacks, or the chewing-gum habit from Marjorie Ashley. Therefore, you had better turn him over to me and the same old germs he is accustomed to when his muzzer eats him up."

Forthwith she swung the big child up lightly in her slender arms and, with gurgles of laughter, de-

voured him with her lips, while he squealed, and hugged, and kicked, and vigorously returned the kisses. Then she held him head downward, with his curls dangling and apparently all the blood in his body surging through the surcharged veins of his red face as he screamed in delight.

“Why, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney,” said the wondering Marjorie volubly, “everybody on the boat has been kissing Ned ever since he came aboard. The mate says he is so sweet that he took Ned’s finger to stir his coffee with and declared it needed no other sweetening, either long or short. And little Ned believed him and sat on his knee while he ate his breakfast waiting to stir his second cup for him. Ned has got a whole heap of microbes if kissing gives ‘em. Why, even that big deer-hound that is freighted to Vicksburg and has been sitting the picture of despair and home-sickness, refusing to eat,—dog-biscuit, or meat, or anything,—just tumbled little Ned over on the deck and licked his face from his hair to his chin. And when he let Ned up at last Ned just hugged the dog, and they kissed each other smack in the mouth. Then they raced up and down the deck among the freight, playing hide and seek till little Ned could hardly stir. Then the deer-hound ate his breakfast, and is sitting down there right now, begging the leadsman for more.”

“Oh, well, then, let him go to his nurse and get his mouth washed out with a solution of carbolic acid or some other anti-toxin,—perhaps that may be a staggerer for the microbes.”

She let the child slide to the floor and then followed the tousled little figure as it sped in a swift trot to her stateroom. He paused for her to turn

the bolt of the door, and as it opened he slipped under her arm and disappeared, microbe-laden, within.

Her husband sat silent, dismayed, amazed, scarcely able to believe his senses. He was of the type of human being who, subtly and especially fitted to cause pain, was not himself adjusted to stoical suffering. He had a thousand sensitive fibers. His pride burned within him like an actual fire. While it was appropriate that in public appearances a wife should seem to be the predominant consideration, there being more grace in a deferential affectation than in a sultan-like swagger, this pose had such scant reality in the domestic economy that when Paula presumed upon it in this radical nonchalance, he was at once astounded, humiliated, and deeply wounded. He found it difficult to understand so strange a departure from her habitual attitude toward him, his relegation to the satiric methods with which she favored the world at large, the merciless exposure to ridicule of his remonstrance, which was, indeed, rather the vent of fretful ill-humor than any genuine objection or fear of infection. The least exertion of feminine tact in response to his wish would have quietly spirited the child away and without comment ended these repugnant caresses of the little fellow by strangers. Floyd-Rosney began to experience a growing conviction that it all was the influence of the presence of Ducie. He had had some queer, not unrelished, yet averse interest in studying in another man the face of the lover whom he had supplanted. He could scarcely have brooked the sight of the man she had loved, to tranquilly mark his facial traits, to appraise his mental

development, to speculate on his social culture and worldly opportunities. But this was merely his image. Here was his twin brother, his faithful facsimile. Floyd-Rosney had been surprised to note how handsome he was, how obviously intelligent, how dashing. He had been flattered as well,—this was no slight mark of honest preference on the part of Paula, no mean rival he had put aside. He had felt a glow of added pride in the fact, an accession of affection. He had noted the studied calm, the inexpressive pose, the haughty simulation of indifference with which Ducie had sustained the awkward *contretemps* of their meeting, the strain upon *savoir faire* which the conventions imposed upon the incident.

And now, as he met Ducie's eyes again, he perceived elation in them, disproportionate, futile, but delighted. It was the most trivial of foolish trifles, Floyd-Rosney said to himself, but this man had seen him set at naught, put to the blush, held up to ridicule by his wife, airily satiric, utterly unmindful of his dignity, nay, despising its tenuity, and leading the laugh at his discomfiture.

Ducie caught himself with difficulty. He was so conscious of the unguarded expression of his face, the look of relish, of triumph, of contempt surprised in his eyes, that he made haste to nullify the effect. The whole affair was the absent Randal's, and he must take heed that he did not interfere by word or look or in any subtle wise in what did not concern him,—it was, indeed, of more complicated intent than heretofore he was aware. He was a man of very definite tact but he had hardly realized the extent of the endowment until that mo-

ment. He appreciated the subtle value of his own impulse, as if it had been another's, when he said, directly addressing Floyd-Rosney, as if there had been only the element of good-natured joviality in the episode, "I think we are all likely to encounter dangers more formidable than microbes.—Have you any experience of cloud-bursts, Mr. Floyd-Rosney? This fall of water is something prodigious, to my mind."

In his personal absorptions Floyd-Rosney had not noticed the rain. "Is it more than a 'season,' do you think?—the breaking up of this long drought?" Floyd-Rosney quickly adopted the incidental tone.

He was so essentially a proud man that he would fain think well of himself. His credulity expanded eagerly to the hope that to others the episode of the morning might seem, as apparently to this man, only a bit of gay badinage, the feminine insolence of a much indulged wife to her lenient lord and master. To himself it could not bear this interpretation, nor to her. He could never forget nor forgive the impulse that informed it. But he was quick to seize the opportunity to reinstate his self-possession, nay, the only possibility to "save his face" and hold up his head. Such demands his assuming dignity made on the deference of all about him that taken in this wise the incident could hardly appear serious.

"If there were thunder and lightning it might seem the equinoctial," said Ducie, "although it is something late in the year."

They had walked together down the saloon and to the forward part of the cabin where they stood at the curving glass front looking out on vacancy.

The rain fell, not in torrents now, but in unbroken sheets of gray crystal, opaque and veined with white. As the water struck the guards it rebounded with the force of the downfall in white foam more than a foot high, while sweeping away over the edge with the impetus and volume of a cataract. But for the list of the boat, for the *Cherokee Rose* had not grounded fair and square on the sand-bar, this flood would have been surging through the saloon, but the rain drove with the gusts and, the windward side being several inches lower than the other, the downpour struck upon it and recoiled from the slant. The sound was something tremendous; the savagery of the roar of the columns of rain falling upon the roof was portentous, sinister, expressive of the unreasoning rage of the tempestuous elements and of the helplessness of human nature to cope with it. Suddenly, whether the turmoil had in some sort abated, or alien sounds were more insistently apparent, a new clamor was in the air,—a metallic clanking, repetitious, constantly loudening, was perceptible from the lower deck. Then ensued a deep, long-drawn susurrus. The engines were astir once more. Obviously, an effort was in progress to get the *Cherokee Rose* off the bar under her own steam. A babel of joyous, excited comment in the saloon, at the extreme pitch of the human voice, could hardly be heard in the midst of the turmoil without. All agreed that a vast flood must have fallen to raise the river sufficiently to justify the attempt.

"We are below the junction of several tributaries in this vicinity that bring down a million tuns a minute in such weather as this," commented one of the passengers.

Another, of the type that must have information at first hand, rushed to the door to secure a conference with the Captain, regardless, or, perhaps, unconscious, of the remonstrance of the others. As the door opened in his hand a torrent of water rushed in, traversing the length of the saloon over the red velvet carpet, and a blast of the wind promptly knocked him off his feet, throwing him across the cabin against a huddle of overturned chairs. The other men, with one accord, sprang forward, and it was only with the united strength of half a dozen that the door could be forced to close, although its lock seemed scarcely able to hold it against the pressure from without. For the wind had redoubled its fury. This region is the lair of the hurricane, and there was a prophetic anxiety in every eye.

It is, indeed, well that these great elemental catastrophes are as transient as terrible. Human nerves could scarcely sustain beyond the space of a minute the frightful tumult that presently filled the air. The wind shrilled with a keen sibilance, and shouted in riotous menace that seemed to strike against the zenith and rebound and reëcho anew. The sense of its speed was appalling. The thunderous crashing of the forests on the river bank told of the riving of timber and the up-rooting of great trees laid flat in the narrow path of the hurricane. For in the limitations of the track lies the one hope of escape from this sudden frenzy of the air. Its area of destruction may be fifty miles in length, but is often only a hundred yards or so in width, cut as straight as a road and as regular, when this awful, invisible foe marches through the country. Perhaps

this was the thought in the mind of every man of the little coterie, the chance that the *Cherokee Rose* might be outside the path of the hurricane. The next moment a hollow reverberation of an indescribably wide and blaring sound broke forth close at hand, as the smoke-stacks of the *Cherokee Rose* crashed down on the Texas and rolled thence on the hurricane deck, the guy wires jangling loose and shivering in keen, metallic tones. The boat yawed over, suddenly smitten, as it were, by one fierce stroke. The furniture, the passengers, all were swept down the inclined plane of the floor of the saloon and against the mirrored doors of the staterooms. An aghast muteness reigned for one moment of surprise and terror. Then cries broke forth and futile and frantic efforts were made to reach the upper portion of the cabin. A wild alarm was heard that the boat was on fire,—that the boat had slipped off the sand-bar and was sinking. Reiterated shouts arose for the officers, the Captain, the clerks, the pilot, the mate, and the tumult without was reflected by the confusion and terror within.

Ducie's brain seemed awhirl at the moment of the disaster. As he regained his mental poise he saw Mrs. Floyd-Rosney on her knees frantically struggling with the door of her stateroom, the lock evidently having somehow sprung in the contortions of the steamer under the blast. She looked up at him for an instant, but her tongue was obviously incapable of framing a word in the excitement of that tempestuous crisis. Ducie suddenly remembered, what everyone else but the mother had forgotten, that the little boy had scarcely five minutes earlier gone to the stateroom to be dealt with for the kissing microbes.

Observing the inadequacy of her efforts Ducie rushed to her assistance and sought, by main strength, to force open the twisted and warped door. It was so difficult to effect an entrance that he began to doubt if this could be done without an axe, when he succeeded in splintering it a trifle where it had already showed signs of having sustained a fracture. Into the aperture thus made he thrust his foot and then wedged in his knee, finally shattering a panel from the frame, to the horror of the prisoners within, whose voices of terror found an echo in Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's anguished exclamations.

Ducie triumphantly lifted out little Ned and then the old colored nurse was dragged through the aperture, scarcely sufficient for the transit.

"There you are, good as new," cried Ducie genially.

Some of the doors of the staterooms had burst from their fastenings, and were sagging and swaying inward, offering pitfalls for the unwary, and, in that wild and excited group, Ducie alone bethought himself of precaution. "Look out for the boy, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney,—he may fall through one of those open doors into deep water or into the furnace,—I don't know what is now beneath this part of the saloon,—the boat seems twisted and broken to pieces."

The suggestion of danger to the child was like a potent elixir to Paula. Her eyes, strained and set, recovered their normal look of perception, wild and haggard though they were. She caught the child in her arms and, although trembling and occasionally staggering under his weight, she would not relinquish him to Ducie as he desired, but carried him her-

self safely along the precarious way. Ducie aided her to clamber up the steep incline where the doors ceased and the wall was unbroken, there being here the barber-shop and the office, and the large space utilized as a smoking-room. Through the windows streamed a deluge of rain, and broken glass lay scattered all about.

Most of the passengers had gathered here in an attitude of tense expectancy. A man stood at a speaking-tube and, with a lordly urgency, was insisting that the Captain should take immediate measures to put the passengers ashore in the yawl. It was no moment to relish a conspicuous pose, and Floyd-Rosney was too well habituated to the first place to give it undue value, but he was obviously in his element and carrying all before him. It was a one-sided conversation, but the comprehension of his listeners was quickened by their personal interest in its progress and result.

"No danger?" a sarcastic laugh. "We take the liberty of differing as to that. The boat may go to pieces on the sand-bar."

"A shelter? yes,—as long as she lasts, but how long will that be? The boat not much injured except in the furnishings and glass? You think not?" very sarcastically.

"Oh, you guarantee? Now what is your guaranty worth to people drowned in one hundred feet of water?"

"No, we won't wait to be taken off by the next packet. The river is rising, and the sand-bar might be covered. We demand it,—the passengers *demand* to be set ashore in the yawl."

"Well, then, we will hold you and the owners liable."

"We are not prisoners. What's that? Responsibility? humanity?—shelter? I'll take care of the shelter. Duciehurst mansion is scarcely ten miles down the river. I own it, and the yawl could put us in it in a trice."

"Yes,—we will risk it,—we will risk the wind and the current. *All right. All right.*"

He had carried his point against every protest according to his wont. As he turned, triumphant and smiling, to the anxious, disheveled, drenched group, he had all the pomp and port of a public benefactor. Absorbed in himself and the prospect of his speedy extrication from this uncomfortable and dangerous plight he was utterly unaware that his wife and only child had had urgent need of the succor that they had received from a stranger.

Paula gazed enlightened at Floyd-Rosney as if she saw him for the first time as he was. The scales had fallen from her eyes. His glance met hers. He had no sense of gratulation that she and the boy were safe. He had not known they had encountered special danger. He thought they only shared the general menace which it was his privilege to render less, to annul. He objected to her pose with the boy in her arms. He deemed it inelegant,—as little Ned was much too stalwart for the artistic presentment of the babe in the bosom of graceful maternity,—and the backward cant of her figure thus extremely plebeian. It was not this personal disapproval, however, that informed the coldness in his eyes. The incident of the ridicule to which she had subjected him among these passengers still rankled in

every pulsation. He was glad of the opportunity to confer benefits upon them, from his high position to rescue them from imminent danger, to be reinstated, in their opinion, as a man of paramount influence and value,—a fleer at him should be esteemed, indeed, a self-confessed folly.

“I dare say the old house leaks like a riddle,—I know it is in ruins,” he said, in a large, off-hand, liberal manner, “but it is on solid ground, at any rate, and I shall be glad to entertain this worshipful company there as best I may till we can get a boat that can navigate water and not tow-heads. I know we can’t spend the night here. In fact, the Captain proposes to set us ashore as soon as he is convinced that no boat is coming down,—but, of course, every craft on the river is tied up in such weather as this. If he will set us ashore at Duciehurst with some bedding and provisions I will ask no more.”

There was a murmur of acquiescence and acceptance,—then a general acclaim of thanks, for the wind was still so high that communication was conducted almost in shouts. Nevertheless, Ducie heard very distinctly when Mrs. Floyd-Rosney turned toward him a pale, pained, troubled face.

“You will come, too? You will have no scruple about—about the ownership?” she faltered.

Adrian Ducie laughed satirically. “Not the least scruple in the world. I have the best right there from every point of view,—even his own!—for if my brother is only a lessee, and not the rightful owner, as he contended this morning, Randal is in possession and my welcome is assured in a house of which he is the host.”

"I only thought—I wanted to say——"

The big child was very big in her arms, and had had his share of the suffering from the general tumult and excitement. He was fractious, hungry, and sleepy, although he could not sleep. But he burrowed with his head in her neck and tried to put his cheek before her lips that she might talk to no one but him, and began to cry, although he forgot his grievance midway and attempted to get down on his own stout legs.

"I wanted to say,—you have been so good to me and the baby,—don't Ned, be quiet, my pet,—that I could not bear for you to remain in danger or discomfort on the boat because of any sensitiveness about our presence at Duciehurst."

"Don't you believe it," he responded cavalierly. "I am not subject to any sensitiveness about Duciehurst. I shall have the very best that Duciehurst can afford and be beholden to nobody for it."

## CHAPTER VII

A DIMINUTION in the floods of rain began to be perceptible, and the extreme violence of the wind was abated. Now and then a gust in paroxysmal fury came screaming down the river, battering tumultuously at the shattered doors and windows of the wreck, setting all the loose wires and chains to clattering, and showing its breadth and muscle by tearing up some riverside tree and carrying it whirling as lightly as a straw through the air above the tortured and lashed currents of the stream. The clouds, dark and slate-tinted, showed occasionally a white transparent scud driving swiftly athwart their expanse, which gave obvious token of the velocity of the wind, for, although the hurricane was spent, the menace of the stormy weather and the turbulent, maddened waters was still to be reckoned with. It was scarcely beyond noon-day, yet the aspect of the world was of a lowering and tempestuous darkness. The alacrity of the Captain in getting them afloat argued that he now accorded more approval to the plan than when it was first suggested, and that, although he would not have assumed the responsibility of the removal of the passengers at such imminent risk, he was glad to forward it when it was of their own volition, indeed insistence. A fact that his long riparian knowledge revealed to him was not immediately apparent to

the passengers until the yawl was about to be launched,—the sand-bar was in process of submergence. The rise of the river was unprecedented in so short an interval, due to the fall of the vast volume of rain. During the last ten minutes the Captain began to realize that it was beyond the power of prophecy to judge what proportion of the tow-head would be above water within the hour. It was not difficult to launch the yawl from the twisted timbers of the deck. It swung clear and slipped down with a smart impact, rocking on the tumultuous current as if there were twenty feet of water beneath it.

"Where the yawl is now was bare sand ten minutes ago," commented Floyd-Rosney.

This fact imparted courage to the weak-hearted who had held back at the sight of the weltering expanse of the great river, the sound of the blasts of the strong wind, and the overwhelming downpour of the rain. They were disposed now to depend upon Mr. Floyd-Rosney, who was so masterful and knowing, and who shared all their interest, rather than the Captain, whose conservative idea seemed to be to stick to the boat at all hazards, and to what might be left of the tow-head.

"This is the season of dead low water," he argued. "This rain is local,—the rise of the river is only temporary."

But he had the less influence with them, because they felt that he was complicated by his duty to the owners of the boat and the shippers of freight, and also the traditions that forbid the Captain's abandonment of his deck till the last moment.

He did not resent the discarding of his opinion,

but was quite genial and hearty as he stood on the guards and himself directed the men who were handling the yawl.

"It may be the best thing,—if she doesn't capsize," he admitted,—"though I wouldn't advise it."

Whereupon the weak-hearted again began to demur.

"Don't discourage us, Captain," said Floyd-Rosney, frowning heavily, "we have no other resource."

"I shall use my best judgment, Mr. Floyd-Rosney," the Captain retorted. "I am not here to encourage you in fool-hardy undertakings. We know where we are now,—and we have the yawl and the other boats as a last resource. The weather, too, may clear. It can't rain and blow forever."

"I shall show my opinion by taking to the boat and carrying my family with me," said Floyd-Rosney loftily. "Any one who wishes to go with us will be very welcome at Duciehurst."

He already had on his overcoat and hat and the other passengers, with their suit-cases or such other possessions as could be handed out of their almost inverted staterooms by the grinning roustabouts, began to make their precarious descent to the lower deck on the reeking and slippery stair, all awry and aslant.

"Take care of the Major,—oh, take care of the Major," cried Hildegarde Dean, almost hysterically, as the old man was lifted by his colored servant, who had been with him as a "horse-boy" in the army, and who, though grizzled, and time-worn, and wrinkled, was still brawny and active. In fact, he had lived in great ease and competence owing to his special fidelity and utility in the Major's infirmi-

ties, since "Me an' de Major foun' through de War." In fact, if old Tobe might be believed, the majority of the deeds of valiance in that great struggle were exploited by "Me an' de Major."

"Sartainly,—sartainly," his big voice boomed out on the air, responsive to the caution, "Me an' de Major have been through a heap worse troublements dan dis yere."

And, indeed, surely and safely he went down the stair, buffeted by the wind and drenched by the rain and the spray leaping from its impact on the surface of the water.

Hildegarde herself descended as easily as a fawn might bound down a hill, to Colonel Kenwynton's amazement, accustomed to lend the ladies of his day a supporting arm. She sprang upon the gunwale of the yawl in so lightsome a poise that it scarcely tipped beneath her weight before she was seated beside the old blind soldier, joyous, reassuring and hopeful.

"It is hard to be in danger and unable to help others or even to see and judge of the situation," he said meekly, bending forward under the down-pour, his face pallid and wrinkled, its expression of groping wistfulness most appealing.

"Yes, indeed," she assented, her voice sounding amidst the rain like the song of a bird from out a summer shower. "But I think all this hubbub is for nothing,—the sky is going to clear, I believe, toward the west. Still, the next packet can take us off at Duciehurst as well as from the *Cherokee Rose*. "And, Major," with a blithe rising inflection, "I can see a veritable ante-bellum mansion, and you can go over it with me and explain the life of the

old times. You can refurnish it, Major! You can tell me what ought to stand here and there, and what sort of upholstery and curtains the 'Has-Beens' used to affect."

His old face was suddenly relumed with this placid expectation; his brain was once more thronged with reminiscences. He lifted his aged head and gazed toward the clearing west and the radiant past, both beginning to relent to a gentle suffusion of restored peace.

In this transient illumination the great dun-tinted forests that lined the banks showed dimly, as well as the vast river swirling intervening, tawny, murky, but with sudden mad whorls of white foam where the current struck some obstruction flung into its course by the storm. The wreck of the *Cherokee Rose* was very melancholy as a spectacle since, but for the hurricane, she would have been floated in five minutes more of the deluge of rain. The yawl seemed a tiny thing, painfully inadequate, as it rocked with a long tilt on the swaying undulations of the current. The preparations for departure were going swiftly forward; another boat was in process of loading with material comforts, cots, bedding, all under tarpaulins, boxes and hampers of provisions, and the trunks and suit-cases of passengers. Since escape was now possible and at hand, one or two of the faint-hearted began to experience anew that reluctance to removal, that doubt of an untried change so common to the moment of decision. "It is a long way—ten miles in this wind," said one, "how would it do for a few of us to try that swamper's shack on the bank? The yawl is overloaded, anyhow."

"Now, I *can* advise you," said the Captain definitely. "It won't do at all to trust river-side rats. You might be robbed and murdered for your watch or the change in your purse. I am not acquainted with that swamper,—I speak from precedent. And how can you judge if the shack is above water now,—or whether it has been blown by the hurricane down the river?"

"Still, the yawl *is* overloaded," said Floyd-Rosney, with a trifle of malice. He was bent on exploiting the situation to his own commanding credit, and the proposition, reiterated anew, to withdraw for a different course, nettled his troubrous and sensitive pride.

The next man who stepped into the yawl was the one who had advanced this divergent theory, and Floyd-Rosney flashed a glance of triumph at his wife, who still stood with the child in her arms at the warped rail of the promenade deck. She was pale, anxious, doubtful, in no frame of mind to furnish her wonted plaudits, the incense of wifely flatteries on which his vanity lived. These others had admired his initiative, had gladly adopted his plans, were looking to him with a unanimity of subservience that had quite restored the tone of his wonted arrogance. He could ill brook to see her with that discouraged questioning in her face, gazing forth over the forbidding gray water, letting first one, then another pass her to a place in the yawl. She should have been the first to board it,—to show her faith by her works.

He approached her with a rebuking question.

"Why do you lug that child around, Paula?" he demanded. "He will break your back." He

stepped forward, as if to lift the little fellow from her arms, but she precipitately moved a pace backward. Paula's grisly thoughts were of the dungeon, the trap of the warped stateroom,—whence the boy was liberated by a stranger, while his father, unthinking and unnoting, was absorbed in his own complacence, in his busy and arrogant pose. No,—she would not let the child go again, she would hold him in her arms if his weight broke every bone in her body till they were all in safety.

"I don't want to risk that yawl," she said querulously. "I think the Captain knows best,—he has had such long experience. The yawl looks tricky, and the water is fearful. We ought to take to the yawl as a last resort, when the steamer can't house us. That is always the custom. It is only in cases of absolute necessity that the yawl is used."

It would be difficult to say whether he were more surprised or incensed, as for a moment, with short breaths and flashing eyes, he gazed at her. He was of an impetuous temper, yet not beyond schooling. He had had a lesson, he had felt the keen edge of her ridicule this morning, and he would not again lay himself liable to a public exhibition.

"Why, you must be a graduated pilot to know so much about the river," he cried with a rallying laugh. "The kid and I are going in the yawl at all events. Unloose your hold," he added in a furious undertone. "He is mine,—he is mine,—not yours."

He had laid his hand on both hers as they clasped the child. Floyd-Rosney was still smiling and apparently gracious and good-humored, which might have seemed much, thus publicly withstood in this moment of excitement and stress. He was resolved

that he would not lower his pride by an open and obvious struggle. He did not consider her pride. He forced her fingers apart, invisibly under the folds of the child's cloak, by an old school-boy trick of suddenly striking the wrist a sharp blow. The muscles must needs relax in the pain, the hold give way, and, as the boy was about to slip from her clasp, his father called for the nurse, placed the child in the arms of the old servant and consigned them both to a stout roustabout who had them in the yawl in a trice. Without a word of apology, of justification, of soothing remonstrance, Floyd-Rosney turned away from his wife with brisk cheerfulness and once more addressed himself to the matter in hand.

Paula felt that if this had been her husband of yesterday it would have broken her heart. But that identity was dead,—suddenly dead. Indeed, had he ever lived? She wondered that the revulsion of feeling did not overpower her. But she was consciously cool, composed, steady, without the quiver of a muscle. She made no excuses to herself in her introspection for her husband,—gave him no benefit of doubt,—urged no palliation of his brutality. Yet these were not far to seek. The hurricane had come at a crisis in his mental experience. He had been publicly held up to ridicule, even to reprehension, by his own subservient wife. He had been released from this pitiable attitude by some unimaginable impulse in the brother of the man whom she had jilted at the last moment, and thus confused, absorbed, scarcely himself at the instant of the stupendous crash, he had lost sight of the fact, if he had earlier noticed, that the child was

not with her, and in the saloon,—his latest glimpse of the boy was in her arms. It was natural that he did not witness the rescue by Ducie, for he was planning an escape for them all, and, surely, it was her place to defer to his views, his seniority, his experience, and be guided by him rather than take the helm herself. Naught of this had weight with her. She only remembered the provocation that had elicited her fleer, his furious whisper of objection, his censorious interference, the humiliation so bitter that she could not lift her head while his rebukes hissed in her ears before them all. Then, in that terrible moment of calamity, he had not thought of her, of their son,—had not rushed to gather them in his arms, that they might, at least, die together. Doubtless, he would have said they could die together in due time,—it was not yet the moment for dying—and he was preparing to postpone that finality as far as might be.

And thus it was Adrian Ducie,—Randal's brother—who had saved the child, shut up in the overturned stateroom like a rat in a trap. She knew, too, how lightly Floyd-Rosney would treat this if it were brought to his knowledge,—he would say that not a drop of water had touched the child; he had sustained not an instant's hurt. That he and his nurse had for a few moments been unable to turn the bolt of a door was only a slight inconvenience, as the result of a hurricane. One of the passengers had a badly bruised arm, on which a chandelier had fallen, another was somewhat severely cut about the head and face by the shattering of a mirror. The baby was particularly safe in the restricted lit-

tle stateroom, where naught more deadly fell upon him than a pillow.

But it mattered not now to her what Floyd-Rosney said or thought. All dwindled into insignificance, was nullified by the fact of the covert blow, on the sly,—how she scorned him—that these men might not see and despise him for it!—dealt in the folds of the child's cloak, their child, his and hers! She wondered that he dared, knowing how she had surrendered him to scorn in their earlier difference. Perhaps he knew, and, indeed, she was sure, instinctively, that none would believe; the blow would be considered unintentional, the incident of the struggle to wrest the child from her grasp.

If a moment ago she had seemed pale, haggard, a flaccid presentment of an ordinary type, that aspect had fallen from her like a mask. Her cheeks burned, and their intense carmine gave an emphasis to the luster and tint of her redundant yellow hair. Her eyes were alert, brilliant, not gray, nor brown, nor green, yet of a tint allied to each, and were of such a clarity that one could say such eyes might well gaze unabashed upon the sun. All her wonted distinction of manner had returned to her unwittingly, with the resumption of her normal identity, the reassertion of her courage. The necessity to endure had made her brave, quick to respond to the exigencies of the moment.

As the child's voice came to her through the torrents in a plaintive bleat of reluctance and terror, full of the pain and fear of parting from her, who was his little Providence, omnipotent, all-caring, infinitely loving, she nerved herself to call out gaily to him and wave her hand, and exhort him in the home-

ly phrase familiar to all infancy, "to be a good boy." The tears started to her eyes as she noted his sudden relapse into silence, and saw, through the rain, how humbly and acquiescently he lent himself to the bestowal of his small anatomy in the corner deemed fit by the imperious paternal authority.

Little Marjorie Ashley had been almost stunned into silence for a time. The terrors of the experience, the exacerbation of nerves in the tempestuous turmoils, the suspense, the agitation, the fear of injury or even of death, all seemed nullified now in the expectation of rescue and under the protective wing of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney. Her father, going within to the office for some valuable which he had deposited in the safe of the boat, had charged Marjorie to stand beside Mrs. Floyd-Rosney till his return. The little girl utilized the interval more acceptably to that lady than one might have deemed possible, by her extravagant praises of baby Ned and her appreciative repetition of his bright sayings.

Catching sight of him as he looked up from the yawl, she called out in affected farewell,—"So long, partner!"—her high, reedy voice penetrating the down-pour with its keenly sweet and piercing quality, and she fell back against Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, laughing with delight and gratified mirth, when the response came shrill, and infantile, and jubilant,—"So long, Mar'jee! So long, Mar'jee!"

Floyd-Rosney's look of inquiry as the business of embarkation brought him near his wife was so marked as to be almost articulate. He could not understand her changed aspect. He was prepared for tears, for reproaches, even for an outbreak of indecorous rage. He had intended that, in any

event, she should feel his displeasure, his discipline, and it was of a nature under which she must needs writhe. Anything that affected the boy, however slightly, had power to move her out of all proportion to its importance. In this signal instance of danger, almost of despair, her conduct, her accession of beauty, seemed inexplicable. Her manner of quiet composure, her look, the stately elegance so in accord with her slender figure, her attitude, her gait, peculiarly characteristic of her personality, seemed singularly marked now, and out of keeping with the situation, challenging comment.

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney has got the nerve!" said the Captain admiringly. "She is fit for the bridge of a man-of-war. Are you going to stand by the deck till the last passenger has taken to the boats, madam?"

For Floyd-Rosney, knowing full well that he was imposing on her no danger that the others did not share, had made it a point to pass her by in summoning the ladies to descend to the yawl. In fact, a number of men were seated on the thwarts by his orders. He had only intended to impress her with a sense of his indifference, his displeasure, his power. But he had given her the opportunity to assert her independence, and, incidentally, to levy tribute on the admiration of the whole boat's company.

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney doesn't care for a living thing but little Ned," cried the voluble Marjorie. "If little Ned is safe she had just as lief the rest of us would go to the bottom as not."

Mr. Floyd-Rosney took his wife by the elbow. "Come on," he said, "why are you lagging back here,—afraid to get in the yawl?" Then he added

in a lower voice, "Can you do nothing to stop that miserable girl's chatter?"

But the voice, even hissing between his set teeth, was not so low that Marjorie, being near, did not hear it. At all events, *she* had had no schooling in self-repression, in the humiliation of a politic deference. She flamed out with all the normal instincts of self-asserting and wounded pride.

"No, there isn't any way to stop my chatter,"—she exclaimed hotly, "for I have as good a right to talk as you. I am *not* a 'miserable girl.' But I don't care what *you* say. I don't train with your gang, anyhow!"

"Why, Marjorie," cried Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, and her husband had a moment's relief in the expectation that the indignity offered to him would be summarily, yet tactfully rebuked. But his wife only said, "What slang! Is that the kind of thing you learn at Madame Gerault's?"

She passed her arm about the girl's shoulder, but Marjorie had as yet learned no self-control at Madame Gerault's or elsewhere, and burst into stormy tears. Even after she was seated in the yawl, beside Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, she wept persistently, and sobbed aloud. The grief-stricken spectacle greatly affected little Ned Floyd-Rosney at the further end of the yawl. After staring, in grave and flushed dismay and amaze for a few moments, he made one or two spasmodic efforts to cheer his boon companion from the distance. Then he succumbed to sympathy and wept dolorously and loudly in concert.

Mrs. Floyd-Rosney made no effort to reach him by word or look. Her husband, whose nerves a

crying child affected with such intense aggravation that he was seldom subjected to this annoyance, was compelled to set his teeth in helpless discomfort, and endure the affliction, intensified by the difference in age, and the variance in pitch and vocal volume of the two lachrymose performers.

Thus freighted, the yawl pushed off, at length, into the steely rain, the white foam, and the surging, tawny currents of the river. All looked back at the sand-bar, doubtless, with some apprehensive regret. The sight of the stanch Captain on the deck waving his farewell was not calculated to dispel anxiety. The sand-bar, too, was big,—on board they had scarcely realized its extent. In comparison with the yawl it seemed very solid, continental. They sheered off cautiously from it lest the yawl, too, go aground on some submerged and unsuspected process of land building. It was obviously safer in the middle of the river, despite the menacing aspect of the swift tumultuous current, lashed into foaming swirls by the blast. The tremendous impetus of the flow was demonstrated by the speed of the yawl; in one moment the steamer had disappeared, its great white bulk, lifted high on the sand-bar, showed like a mirage through a sudden parting of the dashing torrents, then fell astern to be glimpsed no more. When the yawl began to run precipitately toward the bank there was a general outcry of fear, but the mate, who was navigating the little craft, explained that it must needs go with the sweep of the current, which now hugged the shore, for the strength of his crew could not make headway against it, heavily laden as the yawl was.

From this proximity to the land the voyagers

could mark the evidences of the fury of the hurricane. Its track through the woods was near a hundred yards wide, in almost a perfectly straight line, and in this avenue the trees were felled, the ground cleared, the levee laid flat. It was impossible to say what dwellings or farm-buildings shared the disaster, for no vestige was left to tell the tale. As the yawl fared onward it encountered one of the great monarchs of the woods, tossed into the river by the gusts that had uprooted it and now borne swiftly on by the combined force of the wind and the current. It required all the strength of the oarsmen to hold back and give precedence to this gigantic flotsam, lest some uncovenanted swirl of the waters fling it with all its towering intricacies of boughs upon the boat, and, hopelessly entangling it, thrash out the life of every creature on board. For the wind was rife in its branches and thus contorted its course. It tossed them high; whistled and screamed madly among them, and the yawl, following reluctantly in the rear, was witness of all the fantastic freaks of these wild gambols of the gusts. This unlucky blockade of their course gave rise to some discussion between the mate and the passengers, and Floyd-Rosney would fain seek to pass the obstruction by a spurt of rowing to one side.

"I am not well acquainted with the current just along here," said the mate, "but if it should make in toward the land with us between it and the bank we would be flailed alive and drowned besides."

There was a general consensus of opinion with the mate's position, and one of the elderly ladies openly remonstrated against Floyd-Rosney's risky proposition, but his wife said never a word.

Suddenly the mate called out in a startled voice: "Back oars,—back,—back," and every roustabout put his full force against the current, but their utmost strength only sufficed to retard the progress of the boat. The tree had been struck by a flaw of wind which almost turned it over on the surface of the water, and then went skirling and eddying down the river. The whirling foliage gave an effect as of a flash of iridescent light through the sad-hued landscape; the leaves all green and yellow, as in a blend of some gorgeous emblazonry, showed now against the white foam and now against the slate-tinted sky. The myriad wild waves, surging to and fro in the commotion, leaped in long, elastic bounds, and shook their tawny manes. In the tumultuous undulations of the waters it required all the skill of the experienced boat-hands to keep the yawl afloat.

"Give it up," said Floyd-Rosney, at length. "We must go back to the *Cherokee Rose*."

"Impossible,—against the current with this load," said the mate.

"We can try, at least," urged Floyd-Rosney. "If we don't turn back the current will carry us down into the midst of that cursed tree in case we have another gust."

"Isn't there a bayou about half a mile further?" suggested Adrian Ducie. "Does the current make in?"

"I am not sure whether it's a creek or a bayou," said the mate, "but the current does make in along there."

"As if it matters a *sou marqué* whether it is a creek or a bayou," sneered Floyd-Rosney contemptuously.

"It makes all the difference in the world," retorted Ducie. "If it is a creek it flows into the Mississippi,—a tributary. If it is a bayou the Mississippi flows into it, for it is an outlet. If the current sets that way it may carry the tree into the bayou, provided it is wide enough, and, if it is narrow, the boughs may be entangled there."

It was one of the misfortunes under which the voyagers labored that these consultations of the leaders must needs be made in the hearing of the others, owing to the restricted space which they occupied. Several had begun to grow panicky with the suggestion that progress was so environed with danger, and yet that return was impossible. Perhaps the mate was skilled in weather-signs not altogether of the atmosphere when he said, casually,

"You seem to be well acquainted with the river hereabouts, Mr. Ducie."

"Not the river itself, but I have made a study of a plot of survey of the Duciehurst lands. Bayou Benoit touches the northwestern quarter-section just where it leaves the river. We cannot be far now."

And, indeed, a sudden rift in the sullen cypress woods on the eastern shore revealed, presently, a stream not sluggish as was its wont, when one might scarce have discerned the course of the water, whether an inlet or an outlet of the river. Now it was flowing with great speed and volume obviously directly from the Mississippi. As the mate had said, the current hugged the shore. The oarsmen made as scant speed as might be while the great tree, in its rich emblazonment of green and gold, went teetering fantastically on the force of the

river. Its course grew swifter and swifter with the momentum of the waters, seeking liberation, until, all at once, it became stationary. As Ducie had thought probable, its boughs had entangled themselves with the growths on one side of the narrow bayou. It was effectually checked for the nonce, although, at any moment, the force of the stream might break off considerable fragments of the branches and thus compass its dislodgment.

"Give way, boys," cried the mate in a stentorian voice. "Give way." The crew stretched every muscle, and the yawl skimmed swiftly past the great, flaring obstruction, swinging and swaying as if at anchor in the mouth of the bayou. Now and again anxious, frightened glances were cast astern. But a pursuit by the woodland monster did not materialize.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE aspect of the Daciehurst mansion gave no token of its ruinous condition when first it broke upon the view. Its stately portico, the massive Corinthian columns reaching to the floor of the third story of the main building, impressively dominated the scene, whitely glittering, surrounded by the green leaves of the magnolia *grandiflora*, ancient now, and of great bulk and height. The house was duplicated by the reflection in water close at hand, whether some lake or merely a pool formed by the rain, Paula could not determine. A wing on either side expressed the large scope of its construction, and from a turn in the road, if a grass-grown track could be so called, came glimpses, in the rear of the building, of spacious galleries both above and below stairs, shut in by Venetian blinds, so much affected in the architecture of Southern homes in former years. A forest of live oak, swamp maple, black gum closed the view of the background, and cut off the place from communication with the cotton lands appurtenant to it, but at a very considerable distance. For the region immediately contiguous to the house had become in the divagations of the great river peculiarly liable to overflow, and thus the forest, known, indeed, as the "open swamp," continued uncleared, because of the precarious value of the land for agricultural opera-

tions. In fact, the main levee that protected the fields now lay far in the rear of the old Duciehurst mansion. Doubtless in times of specially high water seeping rills effected entrance at door and casement and ran along the floors and rose against the walls, and brought as tenants crayfish and frogs, water-snakes and eels, and other slimy denizens of the floods, who explored the strange recesses of this refuge, and, perhaps, made merry, thus translated to the seat of the scornful.

Paula paused on the crest of the old levee. It had been in its day a redoubtable embankment, and despite the neglect of a half century, it still served in partial efficiency, and its trend could be discerned far away. She gazed at the place with emotions it was difficult for her to understand. She could not shake off the consciousness of the presence of Adrian Ducie, nor could she cease to speculate how it must affect him to see his ancestral estate in the possession of the usurper, for thus he must consider her husband. Ducie had grown silent since they had disembarked, and walked a little apart from the cluster of tramping refugees. She dared not look at his face.

But law is law, she argued within herself. It was not the fiat of her husband or of his predecessors, but the decree of the court that had given the property to them. Nevertheless, there was to her mind an inherent coercive evidence of the truth of the tradition of the released mortgage, duly paid and satisfied, and she looked at the old place with eyes rebuked and deprecatory, and not with the pride or interest of the rightful owner.

It was still raining as the group reached the pave-

ment of heavy stone blocks. These had defied the growths of neglect and the wear of time, and were as they had always been save that one of them had scaled and held a tiny pool of shallow water, which reflected the sky. Her husband walked beside her, now and again glancing inquiringly at her. Never before in all their wedded life had so long a difference subsisted between them. For, even if she were not consciously at fault, Paula had always hitherto made haste to assume the blame, and frame the apology, for what odds was it, in good sooth, who granted the pardon, she was wont to argue, so that both were forgiving and forgiven. Now, she recked not of his displeasure. She seemed, indeed, unusually composed, absorbed, self-sufficient. She did not even glance at him, yet how her eyes were accustomed to wait upon him. She looked about with quiet observation, with obvious interest. One might suppose, in fact, that she did not think of him at all, as she walked so daintily erect and slender, with such graceful, sober dignity beside him. He had acquitted himself well that day, he thought, had certainly earned golden opinions, but he was beginning to miss sadly the most adroit flatterer of all his experience, the woman who loved him. As together they ascended the broad stone steps he suddenly paused, took her hand in one of his and with ceremony led her through the great arched portal, from which the massive doors had been riven and destroyed long ago.

“Welcome to your own house, my wife,” he said with his fine florid smile and a manner replete with his conscious importance and his relish of it.

At that moment there came a sound from the

ghastly vacancy glimpsed within, a weird, shrill sound, full of sinister suggestion. The group, peering in from behind them, thrilled with horror, broke into sudden frightened exclamations, before its keen repetition enabled them to realize that it was only the hooting of an owl, roused, doubtless, from his diurnal slumbers by the tones of the echoing voice and the vibrations of the floor under an unaccustomed tread. Some sheepish laughter ensued, at themselves rather than at Floyd-Rosney, but at this moment any merriment was of invidious suggestion and he flushed deeply.

"Here, you fellow," he hailed one of the roustabouts, "get that owl out of here, and any other vermin you can find," and he tossed the darkey a dollar.

The roustabout showed all his teeth, and he had a great many of them, and with a deprecatory manner ran to pick up the silver coin. He was trained to a degree of courtesy, and he fain would have left it where it had fallen on the pavement until he had executed the commission. But he knew of old his companions of the lower deck, now busied in bringing up the luggage of the party. Therefore, he pocketed the gratuity before he went briskly and cheerfully down the long hall to one of the inner apartments whence proceeded the sound of ill-omen.

While they were still making their way into the main hall they heard a great commotion of hootings and halloos, and all at once a tremendous crash of glass. It is a sound of destruction that rouses all the proprietor within a man.

"Great heavens," cried Floyd-Rosney, "is the fool

driving the creature through the window without lifting the sash, little glass as there is left here."

It seemed that this was the case, for a large white owl, blinded by the light of day, floundering and fluttering, went winging its way clumsily scarcely six feet from the ground through the rain, still falling without, and after several drooping efforts contrived gropingly to perch himself on a broken stone vase on the terrace, whence the other roustabouts presently dislodged him, and with gay cries and great unanimity of spirit, proceeded to dispatch him, hooting and squawking in painful surprise and protesting to the last.

Paula had caught little Ned within the doorway to spare his innocence and infancy the cruel spectacle. And suddenly here was the roustabout who had been sent into the recesses of the house, coming out again with a strange blank face, and a peculiar, hurried, dogged manner.

"Did you find any more owls? And why did you break the glass to get him out?" Floyd-Rodney asked, sternly.

"Naw, sir," the man answered at random, but loweringly. He bent his head while he swiftly threaded his way through the group as if he were accustomed to force his progress with horns. He was in evident haste; he stepped deftly down the flight to the pavement and, turning aside on the weed-grown turf, reached the shrubbery and was lost to view among the dripping evergreen foliage.

As it is the accepted fad to admire old houses rather than the new, a gentleman of the party who made a point of being up-to-date began to comment on the spacious proportions of the hall, and

the really stately curves of the staircase as it came sweeping down from a lofty *entresol*. "It looks as if it might be a spiral above the second story, isn't that an unusual feature, or is it merely the attic flight?" he interrogated space.

For Floyd-Rosney, all the host, was looking into the adjoining rooms and giving orders for the lighting of fires wherever a chimney seemed practicable.

"Listen how the old rattle-trap is leaking," said one of the elderly ladies, ungratefully.

Paula made no comment. She was hearing the melancholy drip, drip, drip of the rain through the ceilings of the upper stories. As the drops multiplied in number and increased in volume they sounded to her like foot-falls, now rapid, now slow, circumspect and weighty; sometimes there was a frenzied rush as in a wild catastrophe, and again a light tripping in a sort of elastic tempo, as of the vibrations of some gay dance of olde. The echoes,—oh, the echoes,—she dropped her face in her hands for a moment, lest she should see the echoes materialized, that were coming down the stairs, evoked from the silence, the solitude, the oblivion of the ruined mansion. Neglected here so long, who would have recked if the old memories had taken wonted form—who would have seen, save the moonbeam, itself wan and vagrant, or the wind of kindred elusiveness, going and coming as it listed.

Yet there had been other and more substantial tenants. "The damned rascals have pulled up nearly every hearth in the house," Floyd-Rosney was saying, as he came forging back through the rooms on the right. Then once more among the ladies he moderated his diction. "Destroying the hearths,

searching for the hidden treasure of Duciehurst—idiotic folly! River pirates, shanty-boaters, tramps, gipsies, and such like vagrants, I suppose."

Paula, seated on one of the steps of the stair, cast a furtive glance at Adrian Ducie, who had followed Floyd-Rosney from the inner apartments. His face was grave, absorbed, pondering. Doubtless he was thinking of the persistence of this tradition to endure, unaided, unfostered for forty years. It must have had certainly some foundation in fact.

"Perhaps the vagrants discovered it and carried it off," suggested the up-to-date man.

"Not in the chimney-places," fretted Floyd-Rosney, "which makes it all the more aggravating. The solid stone hearths are laid on solid masonry, each is constructed in the same way, and you couldn't hide a hair-pin in one of them. Why did they tear them *all* up?"

But fires were finally started in two of the rooms on the ground floor where the hearths were found intact. They were comparatively dry, barring an occasional dash of the rain through the broken glass of one of the windows, the ceilings being protected from leakage by the floor of the upper story. Floyd-Rosney began to feel that this was sufficient accommodation for the party under the peculiar difficulties that beset them. The scarcity of wood rendered the impairment of the fire-places elsewhere of less moment. The sojourners were fain to follow the example of the lawless intruders hitherto, who tore up the flooring of the rear verandas, the sills of the windows, the Venetian blinds for fuel. This vandalism, however, in the present instance, was limited, for its exercise required muscle, and

this was not superabundant. True, the Captain's forethought had furnished them with an axe, and also a cook, in the person of one of the table waiters, understood to be gifted in both walks of life. There was present, too, the Major's negro servant, who, although sixty years of age, was still stalwart, active and of unusual size. But neither of these worthies had hired out to cut wood.

The crisis was acute. Floyd-Rosney offered handsome financial inducements in vain and then sought such urgency as lay in miscellaneous swearing. His language was as lurid as any flames that had ever flared up the great chimney, but ineffective. The group stood in a large apartment in the rear, apparently a kitchen, of which nearly half the floor was already gone, exhaled in smoke up this massive chimney. It occupied nearly one side of the room, and still a crane hung within its recesses and hooks for pots. There was also a brick oven, very quaint, and other ancient appurtenances of the culinary art, hardly understood by either of the modern claimants of ownership, but of special interest to the up-to-date man who had followed them out to admire the things of yore, so fashionable anew.

"Naw, sir," said the Major's retainer. "I can't cut wood. I ain't done no work since me an' de Major fought de war, 'cept jes' tend on him. Naw, sir, I ain't cut no wood since I built de Major's las' bivouac fire." He was perfectly respectful, but calm, and firm, and impenetrable to argument.

The other darkey, a languid person with an evident inclination to high fashion, perceived in the demand an effort at imposition. With his spruce white jacket and apron, he lounged in the doorway

leaning against its frame in a most negative attitude. His voice in objection took on the plaint of a high falsetto. "The Cap'n nuver mentioned nare word to me 'bout cuttin' wood. I'll sure cook, if I have got a fire to cook with."

"You black rascal, do you expect me to build your fire?" sputtered Floyd-Rosney.

"The Cap'n nuver treated me right," the provisional cook evaded the direct appeal. "He nuver tolle me that I was gwine to be axed to cut wood."

"How were you going to cook without a fire?" demanded Ducie.

"I 'spected you gemmen had a fire somewhere."

"In my coat-pocket?" asked Floyd-Rosney.

The waiter would not essay the retort direct. He, too, was perfectly polite. "I ain't gwine to cut wood," he murmured plaintively.

"I wish we had kept one of those roustabouts to cut wood instead of letting them all go with the yawl back to the *Cherokee Rose*," said Floyd-Rosney, in great annoyance. "They are worth a hundred of these saloon darkies."

"Don't name *me* 'mongst dat triflin' gang, Mr. Floyd-Rosney," the Major's retainer said, in dignified remonstrance. "But I jes' come along to wait on de Major, an' cuttin' wood is a business I ain't in no wise used to. Naw, sir."

"I never was expectin' to cut wood," plained the high falsetto of the saloon darkey.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ducie. "If this keeps up I'll split some fool's head open."

He threw off his coat, seized the axe, heaved it up and struck a blow that splintered a plank in the middle. Floyd-Rosney, his coat also on the

floor, inserted the blade of a hatchet edgewise beneath it and pried it up, then began to chop vigorously while Ducie prepared to rive another plank.

The two negroes looked on with sulky indifference.

Suddenly the Major's servant grinned genially, without rhyme or reason. "You two gemmen git out of yere. Make yerselfs skeerce. You think I'm gwine to stand yere an' let you chop wood. I know de quality. I have always worked for de quality. I'm gwine to l'arn dis yere little coon, dat dunno nuthin' but runnin' de river, how to behave hisself before de quality. Take up dat hatchet, boy, an' mind yer manners."

Floyd-Rosney surrendered the implement readily and with all the grace of good-will, but Ducie continued to deal the stanch old floor some tremendous blows and at last laid the axe down as if he did not half care.

"We had best run as few fires as possible," Ducie commented as they left the room, "change of heart might not last."

Thus it was that only two of the many spacious apartments were put into commission. One, the walls of which betokened in the scheme of their decoration its former uses as a music-room, was filled with the effects of the ladies of the party, while the gentlemen were glad to pull off their shoes and exchange for dry hose and slippers before the fire of an old-time smoking-room, that must have been a cozy den in its day. The house had long ago been stripped of all portables in decoration as well as furnishing. A few mirrors still hung on the walls, too heavy or too fragile to be

safely removed, wantonly shattered by the vandal hands of its occasional and itinerant inmates. Several of these had been a portion of the original construction, built into the walls, and in lieu of frames were surrounded by heavy mouldings of stucco-work, and this, too, had given opportunity to the propensity of destruction rife throughout the piteous wreck of a palace. In the smoking-room, the haunt of good-fellowship and joviality, Bacchus seemed doubly drunk, riding a goat of three legs and one horn, at the summit of the mirror, and really, but that the figure in half relief was too high to be conveniently reached all semblance of the design might have been shattered. Only here and there was it possible to follow the rest of the rout of satyrs and fauns, the tracery of bowls and beakers and gourds, and bunches of grapes, the redundant festoons of tobacco leaves and replicas of many varieties of pipes, all environed with the fantastic wreathing of smoke, and the ingenious symbolism in which the interior decorator had expended a wealth of sub-suggestion.

There was only a "shake-down" on the floor for the men, and two or three were already disposed upon it at length, since this was a restful position and there were no chairs available. Floyd-Rosney stood with his back to the fire, his hands behind him, his head a trifle bent, his eyes dull and ruminative. He had much of which to think. Adrian Ducie sat sidewise on the sill of a window and looked out through the grimy panes at the ceaseless fall of the rain amidst the glossy leaves of the magnolias which his grandmother,—or was it his great-grandmother?—had planted here in the years agone.

Was that the site of her flower-garden, he wondered, seeing at a distance the flaunting of a yellow chrysanthemum. How odd it was that he should sit here in his great-grandfather's den, smoking a cigar, practically a stranger, a guest, an intruder in the home of his ancestors. He and his brother, the lawful heirs of all this shattered magnificence, these baronial tracts of fertile lands, were constrained to work sedulously for a bare living. He, himself, was an exile, doomed to wander the earth over, with never a home of his own, never a perch for his world-weary wings. His brother's fate was to juggle with all those vicissitudes that curse the man who strives to wrest a subsistence from the soil, to pay a price of purchase for the rich products of the land which his forbears had owned since the extinction of the tribal titles of the Indians. A yellow chrysanthemum,—a chrysanthemum swaying in the wind!

There had begun to be strong hopes of dinner astir in this masculine coterie, and when the door opened every head was turned toward it. But melancholy reigned on the face of the cook, and it was a dispirited cadence of his falsetto voice that made known his lack.

"Mr. Floyd-Rosney," he plained, "I can't dress canned lobster salad without tarragon vinegar. This yere cruet has got nuthin' in it in dis world but apple vinegar. The Cap'n nuver done me right."

"God A'mighty, man, '*lobster!*' I could eat the can," cried one of the recumbents, springing up with such alacrity that his bounce awakened Colonel Kenwynton, who had been able to forget his fatigue and hunger in a doze.

"Get that dinner on the table, or I'll be the

death of you," cried Floyd-Rosney. "We are hungry. It is nearly five o'clock and we have had nothing since breakfast."

The door closed slowly on the disaffected cook, who was evidently a devotee to art for art's sake, for he presently reappeared in his capacity of table servant, as if he had been rebuked in an altogether different identity as cook. He drooped languidly between the door and the frame and once more in his high falsetto plaint he upbraided the Captain.

"The Cap'n nuver done me right. He oughter have let *me* pack that box, instead of the steward. There ain't no fruit napkins, Mr. Floyd-Rosney. Jes' white doilies," he was not far from tears, "white doilies to serve with o'anges!"

The mere mention was an appetizer.

"Let me get at 'em, whether they are served with doilies or bath-towels!" cried the recumbent figure, recumbent no longer. "Call the ladies. Ho, for the festive board. If you don't want scraps only, you had better not let me get there first. Notify the ladies. Does this vast mansion possess nothing that is like a dinner-bell, or a gong, or a whistle, that may make a cheerful sound of summons. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It compromises on something like the crackling of thorns under a pot," said Floyd-Rosney, sourly. Then with gracious urbanity, "Major, let me give you my arm, perhaps our presence at the festive board may hasten matters."

The ladies had already surged out into the great, bare, echoing hall, Hildegarde Dean, freshly arrayed in an Empire gown, as blue as her eyes, protesting that she was as hungry as a hunter. Ducie

offered his arm ceremoniously to her mother, and Floyd-Rosney, who had intended his attention to the old blind Major as a bid for his wife's notice and approval, was not pleased to see the procession, stately and suggestive, by reason of the lordly expansiveness of the place, headed by the heir of the old owners in the guise of host. It was an idea that never entered Ducie's mind, not even when whetting the carving knife on the steel in anticipation of dispensing shares of the saddle of mutton from his end of the table. At this table, in truth, his grandfather had sat, and his great-grandfather also, and dispensed its bounty. So heavy it was, so burdensome for removal, that in the various disasters that had ravaged the old house, war and financial ruin, marauders and tramps, wind and rain, lightning and overflow, it had endured throughout. Mahogany was not earlier the rage as now, and the enthusiasm of the up-to-date man could scarcely be restrained. There were no chairs; planks from the flooring elsewhere had been hastily stretched benchwise on the boxes that had held the provisions and bedding, but even this grotesque make-shift did not detract from his keen discernment of the admirable in the entourage. The size and shape of the room, the old-fashioned bow-window, the ornate mantel-piece, the cabinets built into the walls for the silver and choice show of old china, now without even a shelf or a diamond-shaped pane of glass, the design of the paper, the stucco ornaments about the chandelier, or rather the rod which had once supported it, for the pendants had been dismembered in wanton spoliation and now lay in fragments on the lawn without, the pantry, the china-closet, the storeroom

contiguous all came in for his commendation, and much he bewailed the grinning laths looking down from the gaps in the fallen plaster, the smoke-grimed walls, the destroyed hearth, half torn out from the chimney-place. The stream of his talk was only stemmed by the reappearance of the cook, now with his white jacket and apron in the rôle of waiter. Every eye was turned apprehensively toward him lest he was moved to say that the Cap'n had ordered no dinner to be put into the box. He dolorously drooped over Ducie's shoulder in the place of host, and at once disclosed the melancholy worst. "Dere ain't no soup, sir. While I was speakin' to you gemmen in de—de—in de library, sir, de soup scorched. I had set dat ole superannuated mule of de Major's ter watch de pot an' he didn't know enough to set it off de fire when it took to smokin'. Hit was 'p'tage Bec'mul, sir."

Ducie laughed and called for the roast, and the company, as soon as the functionary had disappeared, addressed their wits to the translation of the waiter's French to discover what manner of soup they had lost.

Paula was not sorry to see Adrian Ducie in his hereditary place; somehow it would have revolted her that she and hers should sit in the seat of the usurper. Accident had willed it thus, and it was better so. She had noted the quick glance of gauging the effect which her husband had cast at her as he made much ado of settling the old Major at the table. Even without this self-betrayal she would have recognized the demonstration as one of special design. How should she now be so discerning, she asked herself. She knew him, she discriminated

his motives, she read his thoughts as though they were set forth on the page of an open book. And of this he was so unconscious, so assured, so confident of her attitude as hitherto toward him, that she had the heart to pity while she despised him, while she revolted at the thought of him.

She wished to risk not even a word aside with him. She was eager to get away from the table, although the dinner that the Captain had ordered to be packed made ample amends for the delay. It had its defects, doubtless, as one might easily discern from the disconsolate and well-nigh inconsolable port of the waiter at intervals, but these were scarcely apparent to the palates of the company. It was, of course, inferior to the menus of the far-famed dinners of the steamboats of the olden times, but there is no likelihood of famishing on the Mississippi even at the present day, and the hospitable Captain Disnett had no mind that these voluntary cast-a-ways should suffer for their precipitancy. It was still a cheerful group about that storied board as Paula slipped from the end of the bench and quietly through the door. If her withdrawal were noted it would doubtless be ascribed to her anxiety concerning little Ned, and thus her absence would leave no field for speculation. She did not, however, return to the room devoted to the use of the feminine passengers of the *Cherokee Rose*, where the child now lay asleep. She walked slowly up and down the great hall, absorbed in thought. She was continually surprised at herself, analyzing her own unwonted mental processes. She could not understand her calmness, in this signal significant discovery in her life, that she did not love her hus-

band. She would not rehearse his faults, retrace in her recollection a thousand incidents confirmatory of the revelation of his character that had been elicited on this unhappy voyage. How long, she wondered, would the illusion have continued otherwise,—to her life's end? Somehow she could not look forward, and she felt a sort of stupefaction in this, although she realized that her faculties were roused by her perception of the truth. The spirit-breaking process, of which she had been sub-acutely aware, was ended. She could not be so subjugated save by love, the sedulous wish to please, the tender fear of disapproval, the ardent hope of placating. Suddenly she was aware that she was laughing, the fool, to have felt all this for a man who could strike her, cruelly, painfully, artfully, on the sly that none might know. But even while she laughed her eyes were full of tears, so did she compassionate the self she ridiculed with scorn as if it were some other woman whom she pitied.

She felt as if she must be alone. All the day since that crisis the presence of people had intruded clamorously upon her consciousness. She would fain take counsel within herself, her own soul. Above all, she wished to avoid the sight of her husband, the thought of him. Whenever the sound of voices in the dining-room broke on her absorption as she neared the door in her pacing back and forth, she paused, looking over her shoulder, tense, poised, as if for flight. And at last, as the clamor of quitting the table heralded the approach of the company, with scarcely a realized intention, the instinct of escape took possession of her, and she sped lightly up the great staircase, as elusive, as unperceived

as the essence of the echoes which she had fancied might thence descend.

She hesitated, gasping and out of breath, at the head of the flight, looking about aghast at the gaunt aspect of the wrecked mansion. The hall was a replica of the one below, save that there were three great windows opening on a balcony instead of the front door. The glass was broken out, the Venetian blinds were torn away, and from where she stood she could see the massive Corinthian columns of the portico rising to the floor of the story still above. A number of large apartments opened on this hall, their proportions and ornate mantel-pieces all visible, for the doors, either swung ajar or wrenched from their hinges, lay upon the floors. Paula did not note, or perhaps she forgot, that the wreck expressed forty years of neglect, of license and rapine and was the wicked work of generations of marauders. She felt that the destruction was actuated by a sort of fiendish malice. It had required both time and strength, as well as wanton enmity, a class hatred, one might suppose, bitter and unreasoning, the wrath of the poor against the rich, even though unmindful and indifferent to the injury. It seemed so strange to her that the house should be left thus by its owners, despite its inutilities in the changed conditions of the world. It had a dignity, as of the ruin of princes, in its vestiges of beauty and splendor, and the savor of old days that were now historic and should hold a sort of sanctity. Even the insensate walls, in the rifts of their shattered plaster, their besmirched spoliation, expressed a subtle reproach, such as one might behold in some old human face buffeted and reviled without a cause.

She had a swift illumination how it would have rejoiced the Duccies to have set up here their staff of rest in the home hallowed as the harbor of their ancestors. They were receptive to all the finer illusions of life. They cherished their personal pride; they revered their ancient name; they honored this spot as the cradle of their forefathers, and although they were poor in the world's opinion, they held in their own consciousness that treasure of a love of lineage, that obligation to conform to a high standard which imposed a rule of conduct and elevated them in their own esteem. Their standpoint was all drearily out of fashion, funny and forlorn, but she could have wept for them. And why, since the place had no prosaic value, had not Fate left it to those whom it would have so subtly enriched. Here in seemly guise, in well-ordered decorum, in seclusion from the sordid world, the brothers who so dearly loved each other would have dwelt in peace together, would have taken unto themselves wives; children of the name and blood of the old heritage would have been reared here as in an eagle's nest, with all the high traditions that have been long disregarded and forgotten. It seemed so ignoble, so painful, so unjust, that the place should be thus neglected, despised, cast aside, and yet withheld from its rightful owners. She caught herself suddenly at the word. Her husband, her son, were the rightful owners now, and it was their predecessor who did not care.

As she stood gazing blankly forward the three windows of the upper hall suddenly flamed with a saffron glow, for they faced a great expanse of the southwestern sky, which, for one brief moment, was

full of glory. The waters of the Mississippi were a rippling flood of molten gold; the dun-tinted, leafless forests on either bank accentuated in somber contrast this splendid apotheosis of the waning day. The magnolia trees about the house shone with every glossy leaf, an emerald for richness of hue, and all at once, far beyond, Paula beheld the solution of the mystery that had baffled her, the answer to her question, the Duciehurst cotton fields, as white as snow, as level as a floor, as visibly wealth-laden as if the rich yield of the soil were already coined into gold. Here was the interest of the sordid proprietors; the home was no home of theirs; they had been absentees from the first of their tenure. The glimmering marble cross, the lofty granite shaft that showed when the wind shifted among the gloomy boughs of the weeping willows in the family graveyard, marked the resting place of none of their kindred. Their bones were none of these bones, their flesh sprung from none of these dead ashes. The Duciehurst lands made cotton, and cotton made money, and the old house, built under other conditions, was suited to no needs that they could create in the exigencies of a new day. Therefore, it was left to shelter the owl, the gopher, the river-pirate, the shanty-boater, the moon in its revolutions, and when the nights were wild the wind seemed to issue thence as from a lair of mysteries.

Paula suddenly turned from the revelation, and gathering the lustrous white skirt of her crêpe dress, freshly donned, in one jewelled hand with a care unconsciously dainty, as was her habit, she noiselessly slipped up the great dusty spiral of the stair leading to the third story, lest curiosity induced some

exploring intrusive foot thus far, ere she had thought out her perplexity to its final satisfaction. She was aware that the day dulled and darkened suddenly; she heard the wind burst into gusty sobs; the clouds had fallen to weeping anew, and the night was close at hand. She was curiously incongruous with the place as she stood looking upward, the light upon her face, at a great rift in the roof. The rain-drops dripped monotonously from smaller crevices down upon the floor with a sort of emphasis, as if the number were registered and it kept a tally. There were doubtless divisions and partitions further to the rear, but this apartment was spacious above the square portion of the mansion, and the ceiling had a high pitch. She thought for a moment that they might have danced here in the old times, so fine were the proportions of the place. Then she remembered that third-story ball-rooms were not formerly in vogue, and that she had heard that the one at Duciehurst was situated in the west wing on the ground floor. This commodious apartment must have been a place of bestowal. The walls betokened the remnants of presses, and she could almost fancy that she could see the array of trunks, of chests, of discarded furniture, more old-fashioned than that below, the bags of simples, of hyacinth bulbs which were uprooted every second year to be planted anew. There was an intensification of the spirit of spoil manifested elsewhere as if the search for the hidden treasure here had been more desperate and radical. The chimneys seemed to have been special subjects of suspicion, for several showed that the solid masonry had been gouged out, leaving great hollows. As she stood amidst the gray shadows in her lustrous

white crêpe gown with the shimmer of satin from its garniture, she was a poetic presentment, even while engrossed in making the prosaic deduction that here was the reason these chimneys smoked when fires were kindled below.

The solitude was intense, the silence an awesome stillness, her thoughts, recurring to her own sorry fate, were strenuous and troubrous, and thus even her strong, elastic young physique was beginning to feel very definitely the stress of fatigue, and excitement, and fear, that had filled the day as well as the effects of the emotional crisis which she had endured. She found that she could scarcely stand; indeed, she tottered with a sense of feebleness, of faintness, as she looked about for some support, something on which she might lean, or better still, something that might serve as a seat. Suddenly she started forward toward the window near the outer corner of the room. The low sill was broad and massive in conformity with the general design of the house, and she sank down here in comfort, resting her head against the heavy moulding of the frame. Her eyes turned without, and she noted with a certain interest the great foliated ornaments, the carved acanthus leaves of the capitals of the Corinthian columns, one of which was so close at hand that she might almost have touched it, for the roof of the portico here, which had been nearly on a level with the window, was now in great part torn away, giving a full view of the stone floor below. This column was the pilaster, half the bulk of the others, being buttressed against the wall. The size of the columns was far greater than she had supposed, looking at them from below, the capitals were fin-

ished with a fine attention to detail. The portico was indeed an admirable example of this sort of adapted architecture which is usually distinguished rather by its license than its success. But she had scant heart to mark its values or effect. Her reflections were introspective. She looked out drearily on the wan wastes of the skies, and the somber night closing in, and bethought herself of the woeful change in the atmosphere of her soul since the skies last darkened. She said to herself that illusions were made for women, who were not fitted to cope with facts, and that it was better to be a loving fool, gulled into the fancy that she, too, is beloved, than to see clearly, and judge justly, and harbor an empty aching heart. For there was no recourse for her. It was not in her power to frame her future. Her husband had, and he knew he had, the most complete impunity, and doubtless this gave him an assurance in domineering that he would not otherwise have dared to exert. He was cognizant of her delicate pride, the odium in which she would hold the idea of publicity in conjugal dissension. She would never have permitted, save under some extreme stress like that of the single instance of the morning, others to look in upon a difference between them, yet there had been from the first much to bear from his self-absorbed and imperious temper, and she had borne it to the extent of self-immolation, of self-extinction. In fact, she was not, she had not been for years, herself. She could not say, indeed, when her old identity had asserted itself before to-day. It was the aspect of the Dicie face, the associations of the past that had recalled her real self to life, that had relumed the spark of pride

which had once been her dominant trait, that had given her courage to revolt at rebuke in Adrian's presence, to hold up her head, to speak from her own individuality, to be an influence to be reckoned with. But of what avail? Life must go on as heretofore, the old semblance of submission, of adulation, the adjustment of every word, every idea, every desire, to the mould of her husband's thought, his preference. She wondered how she would be enabled to maintain the farce of her love, that had hitherto seemed capable of infinite endurance, of limitless pardoning power, and the coercive admiration for him that she had felt throughout all these five years. He was aware, and this fact was so certain that she was sure he had never given the matter even a casual, careless thought, that for the sake of their son, his precious presence, his comfort and care, his future standing before the world, no recourse was possible for her, no separation, no divorce. Floyd-Rosney might beat her with a stick if he would, instead of that deft, crafty little blow he had dealt on her wrist with his knuckles, and she would hide the wales for her child's sweet sake. No law was ever framed comprehensive enough to shield her. She was beyond the pale and the protection of the law. And as she realized this she held down her head and began to shed some miserable tears.

Perhaps it was this relaxation that overpowered her nerves, this cessation of resistance and repining. When she opened her eyes after an interval of unconsciousness her first thought was of the detail of the Scriptures touching the young man who slept in a high window through the apostle's preaching

and "fell down from the third loft." She had never imagined that she should do so reckless, so wild a thing. Her methods were all precautionary, her mental attitude quiet and composed. She still sat in the window, looking out for a little space longer, for she was indisposed to exertion; her muscles were stiff, and her very bones seemed to ache with fatigue. The sky had cleared while she slept; only a few white, fleecy lines, near the horizon, betokened the passing of the clouds. It had that delicate ethereal blue peculiar to a night of lunar light, for the stars were faint, barring the luster of one splendid planet, the moon being near the full and high in the sky. The beams fell in broad skeins diagonally through the front windows, while the one at the side gave upon the dark summits of the great magnolias, where the radiance lingered, enriching the gloss of their sempervirent foliage. The weeping willows in their leafless state were all a fibrous glister like silver fountains, and in their midst she could see glimpses in the moonlight of the white gleam of the marble cross, the draped funereal urn, the granite shaft where those who had once rested secure beneath this kindly roof of home now slept more securely still within the shadow of its ruin. A broken roof it now was, and through the rift overhead the moonlight poured in a suffusive flood, illuminating all the space beneath. She heard the plaintive drip, drip, drip, from some pool among the shingles where the rain had found a lodgment. The river flashed in myriad ripples, as steadily, ceaselessly it swept on its surging way to the Gulf. She was familiar with its absolute silence, concomitant with its great depth, save, of course, in the cataclysmal

crisis of a crevasse, and as she heard the unmistakable sound of a dash of water, she bent a startled intentness of gaze on the surface to perceive a row-boat steadily, but slowly, pulling up the current. She wondered at her own surprise, yet so secluded was the solitude here that any sight or sound of man seemed abnormal, an intrusion. She knew that a boat was as accustomed an incident of a riverside locality as a carriage or a motor in a street. It betokened some planter, perhaps, returning late, because of the storm, from a neighboring store or a friend's house. Any waterside errand might duplicate the traffic of the highway.

How late was it, she wondered, for her interest in the boat had dwindled as it passed out of sight beneath the high bank. The idea that perhaps she alone was waking in this great, ruinous house gave her a vague chill of fear. She began to question how she could nerve herself, with this overwhelming sense of solitude, to attempt the exit through the labyrinth of sinister shadows and solemn, silent, moonlit spaces among the unfamiliar passages and rooms to the ground floor. She remembered that the railing of the spiral staircase had shaken, here and there, beneath her hand as she had ascended, the wood of the supporting balusters having rotted in the rain that had fallen for years through the shattered skylight. Her progress had been made in the daylight, and she had now only the glimmer of the moon, from distant windows and the rift in the roof. She began to think of calling for assistance; this great empty space would echo like a drum, she knew, but unfamiliar with the plan of the house she could not determine the location of the rooms

occupied by the party from the *Cherokee Rose*. If the hour were late, as she felt it must be, and their inmates all asleep, she might fail to make herself heard. And then she felt she would die of solitary terror.

Paula could not sufficiently rebuke her own folly that she should have lingered so long apart from the party, that she should have carried so far her explorations,—nay, it was an instinct of flight that had led her feet. She dreaded her husband's indignant and scornful surprise and his trenchant rebuke. She realized why she had not been already missed by him as well as by the others. Doubtless the ladies who were to occupy the music-room as a dormitory had retired early, spent with fatigue and excitement. Perhaps Hildegarde Dean might have sat for a time in the bow-window of the dining-room and talked to Adrian Ducie, and Colonel Kenwynton, and Major Lacey, as they ranged themselves on one of the benches by the dining-table and smoked in the light of a kerosene lamp which the Captain had furnished forth, and watched the moon rise over the magnolias, and the melancholy weeping willows, and the marble memorials glimmering in the slanting light. But even Hildegarde could not flirt all day and all night, too. Paula could imagine that when she came into the music-room, silent and on tip-toe, she stepped out of her blue toggery with all commendable dispatch, only lighted by the moon, gave her dense black hair but a toss and piled it on her head and slipped into bed without disturbing the lightest sleeper, unconscious that the cot where little Ned should slumber in his mother's bosom was empty, but for his own chubby

form. The men, too, as they lay in a row on the shake-down in the smoking-room with their feet to the fire, might have chatted for a little while, but doubtless they soon succumbed to drowsiness, and slumbered heavily in the effects of their drenchings and exhaustion, and it would require vigorous poundings on their door to rouse them in the morning.

Obviously there was no recourse. Paula perceived that she must compass her own retreat unaided. She rose with the determination to attempt the descent of the stairs. Then, trembling from head to foot, she sank down on the broad sill of the window. A sudden raucous voice broke upon the spectral silence, the still midnight.

## CHAPTER IX

PAULA looked down through the broken roof of the portico supported by the massive Corinthian columns. A group of men stood on the stone floor below, men of slouching, ill-favored aspect. She could not for one moment confuse them with the inmates of the house, now silent and asleep, although her first hopeful thought was that some nocturnal alarm had brought forth the refugees of the *Cherokee Rose*.

The newcomers made no effort at repression or secrecy. They could have had no idea that the house was occupied. Evidently they felt as alone, as secluded, as secure from observation, as if in a desert. They were not even in haste to exploit their design. A great brawny, workman-like man was taking to task a fellow in top-boots and riding-breeches.

"Why did you go off an' leave Cap'n Treherne?" he asked severely.

The ex-jockey seemed somewhat under the influence of liquor, not now absolutely drunk, although hiccupping occasionally—in that dolorous stage known as "sobering up."

"If you expected me to stay here all that time, with no feed at all, you were clear out of the running," he protested. "I lit out before the blow came, an' after the storm was over I knowed you

fellers couldn't row back here against the current with the water goin' that gait. So I took my time as you took yourn."

The next speaker was of a curiously soaked aspect, as if overlaid with the ooze, and slime, and decay of the riverside, like some rotting log or a lurking snag, worthless in itself, without a use on either land or water, neither afloat nor ashore, its only mission of submerged malice to drive its tooth into the hull of some stanch steamer and drag it down, with its living freight, and its wealth of cargo, and its destroyed machinery, to a grave among the lifeless roots. His voice seemed water-logged, too, and came up in a sort of gurgle, so defective was his articulation.

"You-all run off an' lef' me las' night, but Jessy Jane put me wise this mornin', an' I was away before the wind had riz. I stopped by here to see if you was about, but I declar' if I had knowed that you had lef' Cap'n Treherne in thar tied up like a chicken, I'm durned if I wouldn't hev set him loose, to pay you back for the trick you played me. But I met up with Colty," nodding at the jockey, "an' we come back just now together."

Binnhart's brow darkened balefully as he listened to this ineffective threat while old Berridge chuckled.

Another man with a sailor-like roll in his walk was leaning on an axe. Suddenly he cast his eyes up at the pilaster. Paula on the shadowy side of the window sat quite still, not daring to move, hoping for invisibility, although her heart beat so loud that she thought they might hear its pulsations even at the distance.

"Durned if I got much sense out of that fool builder's talk to you, Jasper," he said. "I think you paid out too much line,—never held him to the p'int. You let him talk sixteen ter the dozen 'bout things we warn't consarned with, pediments, an' plinths, an' architraves, an' entablatures, an', shucks, I dunno now what half of 'em mean."

"I had to do that to keep him from suspicionin' what we were after," Binnhart justified his policy. "All I wanted to know was just what a 'pilaster' might be."

"An' this half column ag'in the wall is the 'pilaster' the Crazy talked about?" And once more the shanty-boater cast up a speculative eye. "But I ain't sensed yit what he meant by his mention of a capital."

"Why, Jackson, capital of Miss'ippi, ye fool you, fines' city in the Union," exclaimed a younger replica of the old water-rat, coming up from the shrubbery with a lot of tools in a smith's shoeing-box, from which, as he still held it, Binnhart began with a careful hand to select the implements that were needed for the work.

"How do you know the plunder is in the 'pilaster'?" asked Connover, the dejected phase of the "after effects" clouding his optimism.

"Why, he talked about it in his sleep. He may be crazy when he is awake, but he talks as straight as a string in his sleep. Fust chance, as I gathered, that he has ever had to be sane enough to make a try for the swag," explained Berridge. "But I dunno why you pick out this partic'lar pilaster," and he, too, gazed up at its lofty height.

"By the way he looked at it when we was fetchin'

him in from the skiff, that's why, you shrimp," exclaimed the shanty-boater.

"I don't call *that* a straight tip," said Connover, discontentedly.

"Why, man, this Treherne was with Archie Ducie when they hid the plunder. This is the column he says in his sleep they put it in, an', by God, I'll bring the whole thing to the ground but what I s'arches it, from top to bottom. I'll bust it wide open."

With the words the shanty-boater heaved up the axe and smote the column so strong a blow that Paula felt the vibrations through the wall to the window where she sat.

"What are ye goin' to do with Crazy?" demanded old Berridge with a malicious leer.

"Better bring Cap'n Crazy out right now an' make him tell, willy nilly, exactly where the stuff *is* hid," urged the disaffected Connover.

"Oh, he'll tell, fas' enough," rejoined old Berridge. He began to dwell gleefully on the coercive effects of burning the ends of the fingers and the soles of the feet with lighted matches.

"Lime is better," declared his son, entering heartily into the scheme. "Put lime in his eyes, ef he refuses to talk, an' he won't hold out. Lime is the ticket. Plenty lime here handy in the plaster."

"Slaked, you fool, you!" commented Binnhart. Then, "I ain't expectin' to git the secret out'n Cap'n Treherne now, I b'lieve he'd die fust!"

"He would," said the shanty-boater, with conviction. "I know the cut of the jib."

"We had to keep him here handy, though, or he might tell it to somebody else. But, Jorrocks, can't

you see with half an eye that there has never been an entrance made in that pillar. Them soldier fellows were not practiced in the use of tools. The most they could have done was to rip off the washboard of the room, flush with the pilaster. They must have sot the box on the top of the stone base inside the column. This base is solid."

He was measuring with a foot-rule the distance from the pilaster to the nearest window. It opened down to the floor of the portico and was without either sash or glass. As the group of clumsy, lurching figures disappeared within, Paula, with a sudden wild illumination and a breathless gasp of excitement, sprang to her feet. The capital, said they? The pilaster! She fell upon the significance of these words. The treasure, long sought, was here, under her very hand. She caught up a heavy iron rod that she had noticed among the rubbish of broken plaster and fallen laths on the floor. It had been a portion of a chandelier, and it might serve both as lever and wedge. The rats had gnawed the washboard in the corner, she trembled for the integrity of the storied knapsack, but the gaping cavity gave entrance to the rod. As she began to prize against the board with all her might she remembered with a sinking heart that they builded well in the old days, but it was creaking—it was giving way. It had been thrust from the wall ere this. She, too, took heed of the fact that it was the clumsy work of soldier boys which had replaced the solid walnut, no mechanic's trained hands, and the thought gave her hope. She thrust her dainty foot within the aperture, and kept it open with the heel of her Oxford tie, as more and more

the washboard yielded to the pressure of the iron rod, which, like a lever, she worked to and fro with both arms.

In the silence of the benighted place through the floor she heard now and then a dull thud, but as yet no sound of riving wood. The washboard there—or was it wainscot?—had never been removed, and the task of the marauders was more difficult than hers. She was devoured by a turbulent accession of haste. They would make their water-haul presently, and then would repair hither to essay the capital of the pilaster. Was that a step on the stair?

In a wild frenzy of exertion she put forth an effort of which she would not have believed herself capable. The board gave way so abruptly that she almost fell upon the floor. The next moment she was on the verge of fainting. Before her was naught but the brickwork of the wall. Yet, stay, here the bricks had been removed for a little space and relaid without mortar. She gouged them out again after the fashion of the marauder, and behind them saw into the interior of the pilaster. The cavity was flush with the floor. She thrust in her hand, nothing! Still further with like result. She flung herself down upon the floor and ran her arm in to its extreme length. She touched a fluffy, disintegrated mass, sere leaves it might have been, feathers or fur. Her dainty fingers tingled with repulsion as they closed upon it. She steadily pulled it forward, and, oh, joy, she felt a weight, a heavy weight. She thrust in both arms and drew toward her slowly, carefully—a footfall on the stair, was it? Still slowly, carefully, the tattered remnants of an old knapsack, and a box, around which it had been

wrapped. A metal box it was, of the style formerly used, inclosed in leather as jewel-cases, locked, bound with steel bands, studded with brass rivets, intact and weighty.

Paula sprang up with a bound. For one moment she paused with the burden in her arms, doubting whether she should conceal the chest anew or dare the stairs. The next, as silent as a moonbeam, as fleet as the gust that tossed her skirts, she sped around the twists of the spiral turns and reached the second story. She looked over the balustrade, no light, save the moonbeams falling through the great doorless portal, no sign of life; no sound. But hark, the gnawing of a patient chisel, and presently the fibrous rasping of riving wood came from the empty apartments on the left. Still at work were the marauders, and still she was safe. She continued her descent, silently and successfully gaining the entresol, but as she turned to essay the flight to the lower hall she lost the self-control so long maintained, so strained. Still at full speed she came, silent no longer, screaming like a banshee. Her voice filled the weird old house with shrill horror, resounding, echoing, waking every creature that slept to a frenzied panic, and bringing into the hall all the men of the steamboat's party, half dressed, as behooves a "shake-down." The women, less presentable, held their door fast and clamored out alternate inquiry and terror.

"I have found it! I have found it!" she managed to articulate, wild-eyed, laughing and screaming together, and rushing with the box to the astonished Ducie, she placed it in his hands. "And, oh, the house is full of robbers!"

The disheveled group stood as if petrified for a moment, the moonbeams falling through the open doorway, giving the only illumination. But the light, although pale and silvery, was distinct; it revealed the intent half-dressed figures, the starting eyes, the alert attitudes, and elicited a steely glimmer from more than one tense grasp, for this is preëminently the land of the pistol-pocket. The fact was of great deterrent effect in this instance, for if the vistas of shadow and sheen within the empty suites of apartments gave upon this picture of the coterie, wrought in gray and purple tones and pearly gleams, it was of so sinister a suggestion as to rouse prudential motives. There were ten stalwart men of the steam-boat's passengers here, and the marauders numbered but five.

A sudden scream from the ladies' dormitory broke the momentary pause. A man, nay, three or four men, had rushed past the windows on the portico.

"I hear them now!" cried Hildegarde Dean; "they are crashing through the shrubbery."

"Nonsense," Floyd-Rosney brusquely exclaimed. "There are no robbers here." Then to his wife, "Is this hysteria, Paula, or are you spoiling for a sensation?"

She did not answer. She did not heed. She still stood in the attitude of putting the heavy box into Adrian Ducie's grasp and while he mechanically held it she looked at him, her eyes wild and dilated, shining full of moonlight, still exclaiming half in sobs, half in screams, "I have found it! I have found it!—the Duciehurst treasure."

Floyd-Rosney cast upon the casket one glance of undisciplined curiosity. Then his proclivity for the

first place, the title rôle, asserted itself. He did not understand his wife. He did not believe that she had found aught of value, or, indeed, that there was aught of value to find. Beyond and above his revolt of credulity was his amazement at his wife's insurgent spirit, so signally, so unprecedently manifested on this trip. He connected it with the presence of Adrian Ducie, which in point of facial association was the presence of his twin brother, her former lover. The mere surmise filled him with absolute rage. His tyrannous impulse burned at a white heat. A wiser man, not to say a better man, would have realized the transient character of the incident, her natural instinct to assert herself, to be solicitous of the judgment of the Duccies on her position, to seem no subservient parasite of the rich man, but to hold herself high. Thus she had resented too late the absolute dominion her husband had taken over her, and she felt none the lack of the manner of consideration, even though fictitious, which was her due as his wife.

He took her arm that was as tense as steel in every muscle. "You are overwrought, Paula,—and this disturbance is highly unseemly." Then, lowering his voice and with his frequent trick of speaking from between his set teeth, "you should be with the other ladies, instead of the only one among this gang of men."

"Why not?" she flared out at full voice, "we don't live in Turkey."

"By your leave I will ask Mrs. Floyd-Rosney to witness the opening of this box, which she has discovered," said Ducie gravely, "and you also in

view of your position in regard to the title of the property."

"Certainly I will," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, defiantly forestalling her husband's reply, "by his leave, or without it. I am no bond-slave." Her eyes were flashing, her bosom heaved, she was on the brink of tears.

"Beg pardon," stammered Ducie. "It was a mere phrase."

"Foolish fellow! He thought you had promised to love, honor and *obey*!" said Floyd-Rosney, ill-advised and out of countenance.

"Foolish fellow!" she echoed. "He thought you had promised to love, honor and cherish."

But she was dominated by the excitement of the discovery. She ran to the door of the ladies' dormitory. "No danger! No danger!" she cried, as it was cautiously set ajar on her summons. "The robbers are gone. We have more than twice as many men here, and the Duciehurst treasure is found. Come out, Hildegarde, and give me that lamp. They are going to open the box. Oh, oh, oh!" She was shrilling aloud in mingled delight and agitation as she came running down the hall in the midst of the silvery moonlight and the dusky shadows, the wind tossing her white skirt, the lamp in her hand glowing yellow, and flaring redly out of the chimney in her speed, to its imminent danger of fracture, sending a long coil of smoke floating after it and a suffocating odor of petroleum.

Paula placed the lamp on the table in the dining-room, where the box already stood. Around it the men were grouped on the boards which had hitherto served as benches. Several were shivering in shirt-

sleeves, the suspenders of their trousers swinging in festoons on either side, or hanging sash-wise to their heels. Others, more provident, with the conviction that the sensation was not so ephemeral as to preclude some attention to comfort, left the scene long enough to secure their coats, and came back with distorted necks and craned chins, buttoning on collars. Hildegarde obviously had no vague intention of matching her conduct to the standards of Turkey, for she joined the party precipitately, her blue eyes shining, her cheeks flushed with recent sleep, her hair still piled high on her head and her light blue crêpe dress hastily donned. The elderly ladies, mindful of the jeopardy of neuralgia in the draughty spaces without, had betaken themselves again to bed. The Duciehurst treasure had no possibilities for their betterment and they did not even affect the general altruistic interest.

There was ample time for the assembling of the party for no key among them would fit or turn the rusted lock. The box on the table held its secret as securely within arm's length as when hidden for more than forty years in the capital of the pilaster. Hildegarde suggested a button-hook, which, intended seriously, was passed as an ill-timed jest. Mr. Floyd-Rosney had a strong clasp-knife, with a file, but the lock resisted and the lid was of such a shape that the implement could not be brought to bear.

"The robbers were working with a lot of tools," said Paula, suddenly. "Perhaps they left their tools."

The gentleman who was testing his craft with

the lock looked up at her with a significant, doubtful inquiry. "The robbers?" he drawled, slightly.

They possibly number thousands in this wicked world. Their deeds have filled many court records, and their reluctant carcasses many a prison. But the man does not live who credits their proximity on the faith of a woman's statement. "The robbers?" he drew in his lower lip humorously. "Where do you think they were working?"

"Come, I can show you exactly." Paula sprang up with alacrity.

He rose without hesitation, but he took his revolver from the table and thrust it into his pistol-pocket. While he did not believe her, perhaps he thought that stranger things have happened. They did not carry the lamp. The moon's radiance poured through all the shattered windows of the great ruin with a splendor that seemed a mockery of the imposing proportions, the despoiled decorations, the lavish designs of the fresco, the poor travesties of chandeliers, making shift here and there to return a crystal reflection where once light had glowed resplendent.

Floyd-Rosney had sat silent for a moment, as if dumfounded. Then he slowly and uncertainly threw his legs athwart the bench and rose as if to follow. But the two had returned before he could leave the room, the "doubting Thomas" of an explorer with his hands full of tools and an expression of blank amazement on his face.

"Somebody *has* been working at that wall," he announced, as if he could scarcely constrain his own acceptance of the fact. "The wainscot has been freshly ripped out, but there is nothing at all in the

hollow of the pilaster. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney examined it herself."

"You were looking for another find, eh?—like a cat watching a hole where she has just caught a mouse," said Floyd-Rosney to his wife with his misfit jocularity.

No one sought to reply. Every eye was on Adrian Ducie, who had found a cold chisel among the tools and was working now at the hinges and now at the lock, wherever there seemed best promise of entrance. The hinges were forced apart finally, the lock was broken, and once more the box was opened here where it was packed forty-odd years ago. A covering of chamois lay over the top, and as Adrian Ducie put it aside with trembling fingers the lamplight gloated down on a responsive glitter of gold and silver, with a glint here and there, as of a precious stone. There was obviously insufficient room in the box for the vanished table service of the family silver, but several odd pieces of such usage were crowded in, of special antiquity of aspect, probably heirlooms, and thus saved at all hazards. The method of packing had utilized the space within to the fraction of an inch. Adrian drew out a massive gold goblet filled with a medley of smaller articles, a rare cameo bracelet, an emerald ring, an old seal quaintly mounted, a child's sleeve-bracelets, a simple ornament set with turquoise, and a diamond necklace, fit for a princess. None of these were in cases, even the protection of a wrapping would have required more space than could be spared.

"You know that face?" Ducie demanded, holding a miniature out to Floyd-Rosney, catching the lamp-light upon it.

"Can't say I do," Floyd-Rosney responded, cavalierly and with apparent indifference.

"Perhaps Colonel Kenwynton will recognize it," said Ducie, with composure.

"Eh, what? Why certainly—a likeness of your grandfather, George Blewitt Ducie,—an excellent likeness! And this," reaching for a small oval portrait set with pearls, "is his wife—what a beauty she was! Here, too," handling a gold frame of more antiquated aspect, "is your great grandfather—yes, yes!—in his prime. I never saw him except as an old man, but he held his own—he held his own!"

The miniatures thus identified and his right to the contents of the box established, Ducie continued to lift out the jammed and wedged treasures as fast as they could be disengaged from their artful arrangement. An old silver porringer contained incongruities of value, a silver mug of christening suggestions, a lady's watch and chain with a bunch of jeweled jangling "charms," a filagree pouncet-box, a gold thimble, a string of fine and perfect pearls with a ruby clasp, a gold snuff-box with an enameled lid. The up-to-date man thrust his monocle in his eye to better observe, with a sort of æsthetic rapture, the shepherds dancing in the dainty workmanship. There was an array of spoons of many sorts and uses, soup ladles, salt ladles, cream ladles, and several gold and silver platters. These had kept in place one of the old-fashioned silver coasters, which held contents of value that the least æsthetic could appreciate. It was nearly half full of gold coin, worth many times its face value in the days when thus hidden away from the guerrilla and the

bushwhacker. Every man's eyes glittered at the sight except only those of Ducie. He was intent upon the search for the papers, the release of the mortgage that he had believed all his life was stowed away here.

To every man the knowledge that he has been befooled, whether by foible or fate, is of vital importance. In many ways he has been influenced to his hurt by the obsession. His actions have been rooted in his mistaken persuasions. His mental processes issue from false premises. He is not the man he would otherwise have been.

All his life Adrian Ducie had raged against the injustice that had involved in absolute oblivion the release of the mortgage, that had wrested from his father both the full satisfaction of the debt and the pledged estate as well. Otherwise he would have inherited wealth, opportunity, the means of advancement, luxury, pleasure. He was asking himself now had he made less of himself, the actual good the gods had doled out, because he had bemoaned fictitious values in case there had never been a release and the lands had gone the facile ways of foreclosure, the imminent, obvious, almost invariable sequence of mortgage. Ah, at last a paper!—carefully folded, indorsed. His grandfather's will, regularly executed, but worthless now, by reason of the lapse of time. An administrator had distributed the estate as that of an intestate, and defended the action of foreclosure. The incident was closed, and the sere and yellow paper had not more possibility of revivification than the sere and yellow leaves that now and again came with sibilant edge against the window-

pane, or winged their way on an errant gust within the room through a rift in the shattered glass.

As Ducie flung the paper aside he chanced to dislodge one of the gold pieces, a sovereign, the money being all of English coinage. It rolled swiftly along the table, slipped off its beveled edge, and was heard spinning somewhere in the shadows of the great dusky room. More than one of the gentlemen rose to recover it, and Paula, with unbecoming officiousness, her husband thought, joined in the search. It was she who secured it, and as she restored the coin she laid a glittering trifle before the box, as if it, too, had fallen from the table. "Here is one of the Ducie jewels," she said.

"Why, it is a key, how cute," cried Hildegarde.

Ducie had paused, the papers motionless in his hand. He was looking at Paula, sternly, rebukingly. Perhaps his expression disconcerted her in her moment of triumph, for her voice was a little shrill, her smile both feigned and false, her manner nervous and abashed, yet determined.

"Oh, it is a thing of mystic powers," she declared. "It commands the doors of promotion and pleasure, it can open the heart and lock it, too; it is the keynote of happiness." She laughed without relish at the pun while the up-to-date man thrust his monocle in his eye and reached out for the bauble. There was a moment of silence as it was subjected to his searching scrutiny.

"A thing of legend, is it?" he commented. "Well, I must say that it does not justify its reputation—it has a most flimsy and modern aspect, nothing whatever in conformity with those exquisite examples of old bijouterie." He waved his hand toward the

Ducie jewels blazing in rainbow hues, now laid together in a heap on the table. "Its value, why I should say it could not be much, though this is a good white diamond, and the rubies are fair, but quite small; it is not worth more than two hundred dollars or two hundred and fifty at the utmost."

Adrian Ducie had finally remitted his steady and upbraiding gaze, but Paula was made aware that he still resented unalterably and deeply her conduct to his brother. It was Randal's option to forgive, if he would,—Adrian Ducie held himself aloof; he would not interfere. His hands were occupied in opening a paper as the up-to-date man tendered him the jeweled key, and this gave him the opportunity to decline to receive it without exciting curiosity. His words were significant only to Paula when he said, "Excuse me, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, perhaps, will kindly take charge of this article."

With unabated composure, with extreme deliberation, he opened this, the last paper in the box, which held an enclosure. The yellow glow of the lamp at one end of the table was a rayonnant focus of light amidst the gloom of the great, lofty apartment, and showed the variant expressions of the faces grouped about it. Floyd-Rosney, seated with one side toward the table, resting an elbow on its surface, had an air of tolerant ennui, his handsome face, fair, florid, and impressive, was imposed with its wonted fine effect against the dun, dull shadows which the lamplight could not dissipate, so definite that they seemed an opaque haze, a dense veil of smoke. The countenances of the others, less conscious, less adjusted to observation, wore different degrees of intelligent interest. Hildegarde's dis-

heveled beauty shone like a star from the dark background of the big bow-window where she sat—through the shattered glass came now and then a glittering shimmer when the magnolia leaves, dripping and lustrous in the moonlight, tossed in some vagrant gust. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's aspect was of a conventional contrast, as point-device as if she sat at table at some ordinary function. The sheen of her golden hair, the gleam of her white dress, her carmine cheeks, her elated and brilliant eyes, her attentive observation of the events as they deployed, were all noted in turn by her domestic tyrant, with a view to future reference. "I'll have it out with Paula when we get away from here, if ever," he said grimly within his own consciousness.

The next moment he had incentive for other thoughts. Ducie scanned the caption of the paper in his hand, turned the page to observe its signature, then lifted his head. His voice, although clear, trembled.

"Here is the release of the mortgage, duly executed and with the original deed of trust inclosed."

There was a moment of tense silence. Then ensued a hearty clapping of hands about the table.

Floyd-Rosney satirically inclined his head to this outburst of involuntary congratulation. "Thank you, very much," he said with an ironical smile.

The group seemed somewhat disconcerted, and several attempted justification.

"Always gratifying that the lost should be found," said one. "Nothing personal to you, however."

"I am sure you, too, would wish the right to prevail," said a priggish gentleman, who looked as if he might be a Sunday-school superintendent.

"Well, I hate to see an old family kept out of its own on a legal quibble," said one fat gentleman uncompromisingly; he knew better how to order a dinner acceptably than his discourse.

"It will be difficult to prove an ouster after forty years of adverse possession," said Floyd-Rosney, "even if the release or quit-claim, or whatever the paper is, shall prove to be entirely regular."

"You surely will not plead the prescription in bar of the right," the broker seemed to remonstrate.

"Of the remedy, you mean," Floyd-Rosney corrected with his suave, unsmiling smile. "I should, like any other man of affairs, act under the advice of counsel."

"Why, yes, of course," assented the broker, accessible to this kind of commercial logic. However, the situation was so contrary to the general run of business that it seemed iniquitous somehow that the discovery of the papers restoring the title of this great estate to its rightful owners, after forty years of deprivation of its values, should be at last nullified and set at naught by a decree of a court on the application of the doctrine of the statute of limitations. There was a pervasive apprehension of baffled justice even before the paper was examined.

Ducie was disposed to incur no further Floyd-Rosney's supercilious speculations as to the contents of the paper. Instead, he spread it before Colonel Kenwynton.

"Read it, Colonel," he said, moving the lamp to the old gentleman's elbow.

It seemed that Colonel Kenwynton in his excitement could never get his pince-nez adjusted, and when this was fairly accomplished that he would

be balked at last by an inopportune frog in his throat. But finally the reading was under way, and each of the listeners lent ear not only with the effort to discriminate and assimilate the intendment of the instrument, but to appraise its effect on a possible court of equity. For it particularized in very elaborate and comprehensive phrase the reasons for the manner, time, and place of its execution. It recited the facts that the promissory notes secured by the mortgage were in bank deposit in the city of Nashville, State of Tennessee, that the said city and State were in the occupation of the Federal army, that since the said notes could not be forwarded within the Confederate lines, by reason of the lack of mail facilities or other means of communication, the said promissory notes were herein particularly described, released and surrendered, the several sums for which they were made having been paid in full by George Blewitt Ducie in gold, the receipt of the full amount being hereby acknowledged, together with a quit-claim to the property on which they had been secured. For the same reason of the existence of a state of war, and the suspension of all courts of justice in the county in which the mortgage was recorded, and the absence of their officials, this release could not at that time be duly registered nor the original paper marked satisfied. Therefore the party of the first part hereunto appeared before a local notary-public and acknowledged the execution of this paper for the purposes therein contained, the reasons for its non-registration, and the lack of the return of the promissory notes.

Colonel Kenwynton took careful heed of the

notarial seal affixed, and the names of five witnesses who subscribed for added security.

"Every man of them dead these forty-odd years and both the principals," he commented, lugubriously.

"Great period for mortality, the late unpleasantness," jeered Floyd-Rosney. With a debonair manner he was lighting a cigar, and he held it up with an inquiring smile at the tousled Hildegarde on the sill of the bow-window, her dilated blue eyes absorbed and expressive as she listened. She gave him a hasty and transient glance of permission to smoke in her presence and once more lapsed into deep gravity and brooding attention.

The incident was an apt example of the power of Fate. With the best mutual faith, with one mind and intention on the part of both principals in the procedure, with every precaution that the circumstances would admit, with the return of the original deed of trust, with a multiplicity of witnesses to the execution of the quit-claim and release, which would seem to preclude the possibility of misadventure, the whole was nullified by the perverse sequence of events. The papers were lost, and not one human being participating in the transaction remained to tell the tale. The solemn farce of the processes of the courts was enacted, as if the debt was still unsatisfied, and the rightful owner was ejected from the lands of his ancestors.

"But for the casual recollection of your father, Julian Ducie, who was a child at the time his mother quitted Duciehurst, and this box of valuables was hidden here to await her return, there would not have been so much as a tradition of the satisfaction

of this mortgage," Colonel Kenwynton remarked in a sort of dismay.

"I have often heard my father describe the events of that night, the examination of my grandfather's desk by my Uncle Archie and Captain Treherne, and their discussion of the relative importance of the papers and valuables they selected and packed in this box; one of the papers they declared was in effect the title to the whole property. He was a little fellow at the time, and watched and listened with all a child's curiosity. But he did not know where they hid the box at last, although he was aware of their purpose of concealment, and, indeed, he was not certain that it was not carried off with the party finally to Arkansas, his uncle, Archie, and Captain Hugh Treherne rowing the skiff in which he and his mother crossed to the other side."

"Ah-h, *Captain Hugh Treherne*"—Colonel Kenwynton echoed the name with a bated voice and a strange emphasis. He had a fleeting vision of that wild night on the sand-bar, all a confused effect of mighty motion, the rush of the wind, the rout of the stormy clouds, the race of the surging river, and overhead a swift skulking moon, a fugitive, furtive thing, behind the shattered cumulose densities of the sky. He started to speak, then desisted. It was strange to be conjured so earnestly to right this wrong, to find this treasure, to visit this spot, and within forty-eight hours in the jugglery of chance to be transported hither and the discovery accomplished through no agency of his, no revelation of the secret he had promised to keep.

"Yes, Captain Hugh Treherne," assented Ducie. "He was known to have been severely wounded to-

ward the end of the war, and as he could never afterward be located it is supposed he died of his injuries. Every effort to find him was made to secure his testimony in the action for the foreclosure of the mortgage."

"But he was not dead," said Paula, unexpectedly. " 'Captain Treherne,' that's the very name."

"Why, Paula," exclaimed Floyd-Rosney, astounded. "What do you mean? You know absolutely nothing of the matter."

"The robbers spoke of him," she said, confusedly. "I overheard them." Then with more assurance: "They derived their information from him as to the hiding-place. That's how I found it out. Not that he disclosed it intentionally. They spoke as if—as if he were not altogether sane. They said that he could not remember. But in his sleep he talked 'as straight as a string.' "

"Oh, stuff and nonsense! You heard no such thing!" exclaimed Floyd-Rosney. "You are as crazy as he can possibly be."

The ridicule stimulated self-justification, even while it abashed her, for every eye was fixed upon her. Colonel Kenwynton looked at once eager, anxious, yet wincing, as one who shrinks from a knife.

"They did not understand the meaning of his sleeping words," Paula persisted. "He spoke of pillar and base and pilaster and capital——"

"Oh, oh," exclaimed Floyd-Rosney, in derision.

Paula had the concentrated look of seeking to shake off this embarrassment of her mental progress and to keep straight upon a definite trend. "They spoke, indeed, as if they had Captain Treherne in

reach somewhere,—I wish I had remembered to mention this earlier,—as if he were to be forced to further disclosures if they should fail to find the treasure."

"Oh, this is too preposterous," cried Floyd-Rosney, rising. He threw away the stump of his cigar into the old and broken fireplace. "I must beg of you, Paula, for my credit if not your own, to desist from making a spectacle of yourself."

Colonel Kenwynton lifted a wrinkled and trembling hand in protest. "I ask your pardon; Mrs. Floyd-Rosney will do no one discredit. I must hear what she has to say of this. The gentleman is my dear, dear friend. I had lost sight of him for years." Then turning toward Paula: "Did I understand you to say, madam, that they spoke as if he were in their power?"

The old man was gasping and his agitation frightened Paula. Her face had grown ghastly pale. Her eyes were wide and startled. "I wonder that I did not think of it earlier," she said, contritely. "But it did not impress me as real, as the actual fact, I was so excited and alarmed. I remember now that they said they had gagged him,—I don't know where he was, but they spoke as if he were near and they could produce him and force him to point out the spot. They had 'brought him down,'—that was their expression,—for this purpose. Did they mean,—do you suppose,—he could have been near, in this house?"

Colonel Kenwynton rose, the picture of despair. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, holding up his hands and wringing them hard. "That man saved my life at the risk of his own. And if, by blindness

and folly, I have failed him at his utmost need, may God do as much to me and more when I call from out of the deep. The lamp! The lamp! Bring the lamp! Search the house—the grounds!"

Captain Treherne had endured many hours of duress, of the torture of bonds and constraint, of dread, of cold, of hunger, but the terror of ultimate doom filled his heart when he heard the approach of roving footsteps, the sound of voices unnaturally loud and resonant, echoing through the bare rooms, when he saw a flickering glimmer of yellow light wavering on the ceiling but lost presently in gloom as the party wandered hither and thither through the vacant place. The miscreants who had overpowered and bound him were returning, he thought. In the impaired mental condition from which he had so long suffered, one of his great sorrows lay in his incapacity at times to differentiate the fact from hallucination. He could not be sure that the whole scene of ghastly violence through which he had passed was not one of the pitiable illusions of his mania, and he lay here bound and gagged and famished as treatment designed to mend his mental health. He sought to recall the aspect of the men who, as perhaps he fancied had brought him here,—his flesh crept with repulsion at the thought of them. One had the rolling walk of a sailor. Another was garbed like a jockey,—some brain-cell had perchance retained this image from the old half-forgotten associations of the race course. So much of the jargon of pathology he had picked up in his melancholy immurement in the sanatorium. But these impressions were so definite, so lifelike that if they should prove illusory and this

experience another seizure of his malady it was worse than those that had beset him hitherto, when he had often had a lurking doubt of their reality, even while he had acted as if they were demonstrable fact. It was a terrible thing to harbor such strange discordant fancies. He remembered that during the day, he could not be sure of the time, he awoke from a sleep or swoon to find himself here (or, perchance, he had dreamed), bound and gagged, and the great rough figure of a gigantic negro standing in the doorway of the room gazing upon him with an expression of stupid dismay, and then of horrified fright. The negro disappeared suddenly,—many of the images present to the diseased brain of Captain Treherne were subject to these abrupt withdrawals. Afterward he saw, or, as he stipulated within himself, he thought he saw, through an open door, this swart apparition again, chasing and beating with a boat-hook a large white owl. Now and then, throughout the afternoon, he imagined he heard sounds, faint, distant; footsteps, voices and again silence. Deep into the weary night the hapless prisoner watched the moonlight trace the outline of the leafless vines outside upon the ceiling and wall. This was the only impression of which he was certain. He could not be sure what this seeming approach might mean; whether a fact, direful and dangerous, to which the helpless must needs submit; or whether a fantasy of merely seeming menace.

Suddenly a voice—resonant, yet with a falling cadence; hearty and whole-souled, yet quavering with trouble. “Hugh Treherne! Hugh Treherne!”

it was calling, and a thousand echoes in the bare and ruinous building duplicated the sound.

A rush of confidence sent the blood surging through the veins of Captain Treherne, almost congested with the pressure of the cords. He gave a start that might have dislocated every bone in his body, yet the bonds held fast. He could not stir. He could not reply. He had recognized the voice of Colonel Kenwynton, his old commander,—he felt that he could take his oath to the reality of this fact. There were other voices,—many footfalls; it was a searching party with lights, with arms,—he heard the familiar metallic click as one of the men cocked a revolver. But what was this? They were taking the wrong turn in the maze of empty apartments; the steps of their progress had begun to recede, sounding farther and farther away; their voices died in the distance; the light had faded from the wall.

He thought afterward that in the intensity of his emotions he must have fainted. There was a long gap in his consciousness. Then he saw a well-remembered face bending over him, but oh, so changed, so venerable. He knew every tone of the voice calling his name, amidst sobs, "Oh, Hugh, my dear, dear boy!" He felt the eager hands of younger, strong men deftly loosening the bonds, and the sound of their voices in muttered imprecations, not loud but deep, filled him with a surging sense of sweet sympathy. It was swearing, doubtless, but the sentiment that prompted it was pious. It is not of record that the good Samaritan swore at the thieves, but it is submitted that, in the fervor of altruism, he might have done so with great

propriety. Treherne felt the taste of brandy within his aching jaws. These profane wights were lifting him with a tenderness that might have befitted the tendance of a sick infant. He could not restrain the tears that were coursing down his cheeks, although he had no grief,—he was glad,—glad! for now and again Colonel Kenwynton caught his hand in his cordial grasp and pressed it to his breast.

## CHAPTER X

DAY was breaking. The luster of the moon had failed. Gaunt and grisly the old ruin began to increase in visibility. The full, gray, prosaic light emphasized details, whether of workmanship or wreck, which the silver beams had been inadequate to show. It was difficult to say if the fine points of ornamentation had the more melancholy suggestion in the wanton spoliation where they were within easy reach, or in those heights and sequestered nooks where distance had saved them from the hand of the vandal. The lapse of time itself had wrought but scant deterioration. The tints of the fresco of ceilings and borders were of pristine delicacy and freshness in those rooms where the destroyed hearths had prevented fires and precluded smoke, save that here and there a cobweb had veiled a corner, or a space had gathered mildew from exposure to a shattered window, or a trickling leak had delineated the trace of the falling drops down the decorated wall.

All exemplified the taste of an earlier period, and where paper had been used in great pictorial designs it fared more hardly than had the painting. The vicissitudes of the voyage of Telemachus, portrayed in the hall, were supplemented by unwritten disaster. His bark tossed upon seas riven in gaps and hanging in tatters. The pleasant land where

he and his instructive companion met the Island goddess and her train of nymphs, laden with flowers and fruit for their delectation, was cataclysmal with torrential rains and broken abysses. The filial adventurer was flung from the storied cliffs into a Nirvana of blank plaster.

It had required some muscular force and some mental energy to destroy the marble mantelpieces. Here and there bits of the carving still lay about the floor, the design thus grossly disfigured, showing with abashed effect above the gaping cavity of the torn-out hearth.

The up-to-date man with his glass in his eye, one hand always ready to readjust it, the fingers lightly slipped into the pocket of his trousers, his attitude a trifle canted forward after the manner of the critical connoisseur, was going about, exploring, discriminating and bemoaning. Now and again he was joined by one of his fellow-passengers, who stood with his hat on the back of his head, and gazed with blank, unresponsive eyes, and listened in uncomprehending silence. The interior decoration of the old house represented several periods. The salient fact of wreck and ruin was apparent, however, to the most limited discernment, and the knots of refugees from the *Cherokee Rose* discussed its woeful condition as they wandered restlessly about. They expressed a doubt whether repair would not cost more than the house was worth, argued on the legal effect of the belated discovery of the quit-claim papers, and contemned the spirit of the men in possession in the last forty years to allow so fine a thing in itself to fall into such a desperate condition, while the lands appurtenant were

worked to the extremest capacity of money-making. There was a disposition to deduce from the fact a suspicion on the part of the holders that their title was vulnerable, and a sordid desire to make the most possible out of the property while it was still in possession. It was always Floyd-Rosney's fate to be in a measure justified of circumstances, yet to seem at fault. The question of mesne profits in case of the recovery of property did not suggest itself for some time, and when it did arise it was submitted that mesne profits were mighty hard to get and often could not be made from the interloper.

"They can make the money out of Floyd-Rosney, though,—he has got money to burn. For one, I don't care if he does lose. It would be outrageous for him to defend the suit for recovery and plead the statute of limitations," said the fat man, who did not mince his opinions.

"But he may win out," said the broker. "Possession is nine-tenths of the law,—and for forty years under a decree of the Chancery court."

"Forty thousand years would do him no good in the face of that release," protested another. "It was wrongful possession from the beginning. Floyd-Rosney is a trespasser here and nothing more."

"But can you call a man a 'trespasser' who holds under color of title? His is an adverse possession," argued the broker.

And the wrangle began anew with revived spirit. It was well, perhaps, that the refugees had a subject of discussion so charged with immediate and general interest, since they had no resource but to roam the old place until breakfast should be announced. After this meal they would resume their

fitful wanderings till a boat should be sighted. They had turned out of their comfortable quarters when Captain Treherne had been brought to the restricted inhabited space of the old building, relinquishing the shake-down and the fire to him and his special ministrants.

Now and again a speculation concerning breakfast agitated the group of men, and one venturesome spirit made a journey down the quaking old rear verandah to the kitchen, stepping over gaps where the flooring had been torn up for fuel and walking the rotting sills when the hiatus was too wide to be leaped. His errand to expedite breakfast was, apparently, without result.

"Yes, sah," said the waiter-cook, into whose gloomy soul morning had yet cast no illuminating ray. "I gwine ter dish up when de breakfast is cooked,—nuver knowed you wanted it raw. Cap'n nuver treated me right,—no range, no cook-fixin's,—nuthin'—an' breakfast expected to be smokin' on de table 'fore de fog is off de river. Naw, Sah,—ef you kin cook it any quicker, why cook it yourself, Sah. *I ain't got no dijections to your cookin' it.*"

Upon his return from his tour of discovery, being earnestly interrogated as to the prospects by his fellow-refugees, the gentleman gave this sage advice: "If you don't want to have to knock an impudent nigger down you will stay here and eat breakfast when he has a mind to serve it."

The fog clung to the face of the river. It stood blank and white at the great portal of the house, and sifted through the shattered windows, and silence dominated it. One felt infinitely removed from all the affairs of life. The world was not even a neighbor.

bor. Time seemed annihilated. It could not be that yesterday, at this hour, they stood on the stanch deck of the *Cherokee Rose*, or that only the week before they trod the streets of Memphis, or Vicksburg, or Helena. That white pall seemed to shut off all the possibilities of life, and there was a sort of shock, as of a revulsion of nature, when there came through this flocculent density the sound of a horse's hoofs on the graveled drive, and then, on the portico, the ponderous measured tread of a man of weight and bulk.

He was in the hall before the group was aware of his entrance. Hale and strong, although of advanced years, well dressed in a sober fashion, grave, circumspect, reticent of manner, he had turned toward the second door before a word of his intent could be asked. A gesture had answered his inquiry for Captain Hugh Treherne. He entered, without knocking, and the door closed on silence. The group in the hall stared at one another, aware, in some subtle way, of a crisis which the simple facts did not explain.

Suddenly a wild cry of defiance rose from within,—a quivering, aged voice full of rancor and of rage.

“I will resist to the death,—begone, begone, sir, before I do you a mischief.”

It was the voice of Colonel Kenwynton, furious, fierce, beyond placation, beyond argument, beyond self-control.

A murmur of remonstrance rose for a moment. Then the group outside followed the example of the stranger and, without ceremony, burst in at the door.

The stranger stood in quiet composure with his

back to the fire while the old Colonel, his bushy white eyebrows bent above eyes that flashed all the lightnings of his youth, waved his hand toward the door, exclaiming with an intonation of contempt that must have scathed the most indurated sensibilities, "Begone, sir,—out of the door, if you like, or I will throw you out of the window." He stamped his foot as if to intimidate a cur. "Begone! Rid us of your intolerable presence."

Captain Treherne, who had lain all the early morning hours on the rugs and blankets on the floor, seeking to recuperate from his terrible experience of constraint, had arisen with an alertness scarcely to be expected. He laid a restraining hand on the old man's arm. Colonel Kenwynton placed his own trembling hand over it.

"Captain Treherne is among his friends who will revenge it dearly if you attempt the least injury. Insane! He is most obviously, most absolutely sane, and on that fact I will stake my soul's salvation. Any attempt at his incarceration,—you despicable trickster, I have no doubt you turn your penny out of this burial alive,—before God, sir, I'll make you rue it. I will publish you throughout the length and the breadth of the land, and I will beat you with this stick within an inch of your life."

He brandished his heavy cane, and, despite his age and his depleted strength, he was a most formidable figure as he advanced. Once more Treherne caught at his arm. So tense were its muscles that he could not pull it down, but he hung upon it with all his weight.

The stranger eyed Colonel Kenwynton with the utmost calm, a placidity devoid alike of fear and

of the perception of offense. He spoke in a quiet, level tone, with an undercurrent of gentle urgency.

"Sane or insane, Hugh Treherne never intentionally deceived a friend," he remarked composedly. "Tell him the facts, Captain Treherne,—he deserves to know them."

He met at the moment Treherne's eye. A long look passed between them,—a terrible look, fraught with some deep mystery, of ghastly intendment, overwhelming, significant, common to both, which neither would ever reveal. There was in it something so nerve-thrilling, so daunting, that Colonel Kenwynton's bold, bluff spirit revolted.

"None of your hypnotism here!" he cried, again brandishing his stick. "I will not stand by and see you seek to subjugate this man's mind with your subtle arts. So much as cast your evil eye upon him again and I will make you swallow a pistol-ball and call it piety. (Where is that damned revolver of mine?)" He clapped his hand vainly to his pistol-pocket.

"Hugh," the stranger's tone was even more gently coercive than before. "Tell him, Hugh. He is not a man to delude."

"Colonel," cried Treherne, still hanging on the old man's arm, "this gentleman means me nothing but kindness. He would not,—he could not,—why, don't you know he was a surgeon in the Stones' River campaign? For old sake's sake he would do me no harm."

Colonel Kenwynton himself looked far from the normal, his white hair blowzing about his face, fiery red, his blue eyes blazing with a bluer flame, his

muscles knotted and standing out as he clutched his stick and brandished it.

"I don't care if he was commander-in-chief, he shall not mesmerize you, if that is what he calls his damnable tricks. Hugh,—forty years! Oh, my dear boy, that I should have lost sight of you for forty years, what with my debts, and my worries, and my shifts to keep a whole roof over my head, and a whole coat on my back. Forty years,—I thought you were dead. I had been told you were dead,—that is your Cousin Thomas's work,—I'll haul *him* over the coals. And you as sane as I am all the time! Begone, sir!" and once more he waved his stick at the stranger. "I will see to it that every process known to the law is exhausted on you! The vials of wrath shall be emptied! Oh, it is too late for apology, for repentance, for sniveling!"

For still the stranger's manner was mild and gravely conciliatory. "Oh, Hugh," he said reproachfully, "why don't you tell him?"

Once more their glances met.

"Colonel," said Treherne falteringly, "I am not sane. I admit it."

"I know better," Colonel Kenwynton vociferated, facing around upon him. "You are as sane as I am, as any man. This is hypnotism. I saw how that fellow looked at you. I marked him well. Why, sanity is in your every intonation."

Treherne took heart of grace. "But, Colonel, this is a lucid interval. Sometimes I am not myself,—in fact, for many years I was *absent*." He used the euphemism with a downcast air, as if he could not brook a plainer phrase. Then, visibly bracing himself, "It was the effects of the old wound,—the

sabre cut on the skull. It injured the brain. I have persuasions—obsessions.” His words faltered. His eyes dilated. There was a world of unexpressed meaning in his tone, as he lowered his voice, scarcely moving his lips. “Sometimes I am possessed by the Devil.”

“We will not speak of that to-day,” said the stranger suavely.

“It is impossible!” exclaimed the Colonel dogmatically. “Look at the facts,—you come to me out on that sand-bar to induce me to aid you in the search for the Ducie treasure and title papers, their recovery is due to your effort and, in all probability, the restoration of this great estate to its rightful owners.”

“Ah,” exclaimed the stranger with intense interest. He looked elated,—inordinately elated.

“And because you had forgotten in the lapse of time—forty years,—the exact spot where you and Archie Ducie hid the box away, and the wind was blowing, and the rain imminent, I put it off—like a fool—and these fiends of river pirates, or gipsies, or what not, got the information from you when you were asleep,—talking in your sleep.”

“Subconscious cerebration,” murmured the alienist.

“And because they did not exactly understand the terms of architecture you used they brought you down here to force you to point out the spot, and bound and gagged you,—oh,—Hugh, my heart bleeds for you!”

“But can’t you think for him a little, Colonel—can’t you advise him? Forty years of seclusion does not fit a man to cope with the world without some

preparation for the encounter,—he was in danger of his life, in falling among these thieves. He incurred a jeopardy which I know he esteems even greater. He is on the verge of a most extraordinary cure,—in all my experience I have never known its parallel. Any disastrous chance might yet prevent its completion. Now that he has accomplished all that he so desired to do, can't you advise him to go back with me to treatment, regimen, safety."

"Not unless I know what ails him," said the Colonel stoutly.

Once more the eyes of Treherne and the stranger met, with that dark and dreadful secret between them. Colonel Kenwynton appraised the glance and its subtle significance, and fell to trembling violently.

"It is something that we cannot mention this day,—this day is clear," said the alienist firmly.

"I cannot go back,—I cannot go back,—and meet it there," cried Treherne wildly. "It is waiting for me,—where I have known it so long. I shall pass the vestibule, perhaps,—but there in the hall"—he paused, shivering.

"You see that, as yet, you cannot protect yourself in the world, even now, when you are as sane as the Colonel. But, for the accident that brought these people here, you might have been murdered by those miscreants for the secret hiding-place that had slipped your memory. You might have been heedlessly left on the floor bound and gagged to die. It was the merest chance that I happened to think you might be at Duciehurst."

Treherne was trembling in every fiber. Cold drops of moisture had started on his brow. His

eyes were dilated and quickly glancing, as he contemplated this obsession to which neither dared to refer openly, lest the slight bonds that held the mania within bounds, the exhaustion of the spasm of insanity, called the lucid interval, be overstrained and snap at once.

"I believe I would not meet it here, in the world, —away from where it has been so long," he said doggedly.

"What would you do if you should? You might hurt yourself,—and Hugh, and this you would deplore more, you might injure some one else," said the doctor.

Treherne suddenly turned, throwing his arms about Colonel Kenwynton in a paroxysm of energy.

"Colonel, lead the way. Go with me, for I would follow you to hell if you led the charge. God knows I have done that often enough. Lead the charge, Colonel!"

"Yes, come with us, Colonel," said the alienist cordially,—it could but seem a sinister sort of hospitality. "We should be delighted to entertain you for a few days, or, indeed, as long as you will stay. It is not a public institution, but we have a beautiful place,—haven't we, Hugh?—something very extra in the way of conservatories. Hugh has begun to take much interest in our orchids. It is a good distance, but Mr. Ducie drove me down here from Caxton with his fast horse in less time than I could have imagined."

"Mr. Ducie?" said Adrian Ducie, with a start. "Where is he? Has he gone?"

The doctor stared as if he himself had taken leave of his senses. "You remember," he said confusedly,

blending the reminder with an air of explanation to the group generally, "that when we had that game of billiards at your hotel in Caxton last evening I asked you a question or two about the Duciehurst estate; I didn't like to say much, but your replies gave me the clew as to where Captain Treherne had gone after his escape from the Glenrose sanatorium. He had inquired about Duciehurst as soon as he began to recover his memory, and seemed to recur to the subject and to brood upon it. The idea stayed with me all night, for I was very anxious, and about daybreak I took the liberty of rousing you by telephone to ask if the roads here from Caxton were practicable for a motor-car. You remember, don't you?"

He paused, looking in some surprise at Adrian.

"You told me," he continued, "that the roads would be impracticable after these rains, and as I disclosed the emergency, in my great perturbation for Captain Treherne's safety, you offered to drive me down, as you had an exceptionally speedy horse which you kept for your easy access from Caxton to the several plantations that you lease in this vicinity."

Captain Treherne, the possession of his faculties as complete at the moment as if he had never known the aberrations of a mania, listened with an averse interest and a lowering brow to these details of the preparations made for his capture and reincarceration. The alienist did not seem to observe his manner but went on, apparently at haphazard. "I regretted to put you to so great an inconvenience at this hour, but you relieved my mind by saying that you knew that Captain Treherne had been a valued

friend of your uncle's, and that you not only felt it incumbent on you to be of any service possible to him, but esteemed it a privilege."

"But where,—where is Randal Ducie now?" asked Adrian, turning hastily to the door.

The doctor's face was a picture of uncomprehending perplexity. "Why, isn't this you?" he asked.

"Oh, no. It is my brother," exclaimed Adrian, amidst a burst of laughter that relieved the tension of the situation. Several followed from the room to witness, at a distance not very discreet, the meeting of the facsimile brothers.

Randal Ducie had hitched the horse and the four-seated phaeton which they had had the precaution to provide to the old rack, and, awaiting the return of the physician, had strolled aimlessly up the pavement through the rolling fog to the steps of the portico. There he was suddenly confronted by the image of himself. He looked startled for a moment; then, with a rising flush and a brightening eye, ascended the flight with an eager step.

"Hello," said one brother cavalierly.

"Hello yourself," responded the other.

"Let me show you how the fellows kiss the cheek in old France," said Adrian.

"Let me show you how the fellows punch the head in old Mississippi," said Randal.

There was a momentary scuffle, and then, arm in arm and both near to tears, they strolled together down the long portico of their ancestral home with much to say to each other, after their separation, and much to hear.

The group of men at the door, looking laughingly

after them, might readily have discriminated the moment of the disclosure of the discovery of the Duciehurst treasure with the release of the mortgage foreclosed so long ago. Randal paused abruptly, facing round upon his brother and apparently listening in stunned amaze. They were too distant for words to be distinguished, but his voice came on the air, loud and excited, in eager questioning. He was, evidently, about to turn within the house, possibly to have the evidence of his eyes to the intendment and validity of this paper, when Adrian, by a gesture, checked him. The fog was beginning to lift, and the figures of the two men were imposed on a vista of green, where the sunlight in a delicate clarity after the rains, in a refined glister of matutinal gold, was beginning to send long glinting beams among the glossy foliage of the magnolias, and to light with reverent tapering shafts the solemn aisles of the weeping willows where the tombstones reared unchanged their mortuary memorials, unmindful of sheen or shadow, of fair weather or foul, even of time, as the years came and went, a monition only of death and a prophecy of eternity.

"There is one thing I must tell you, Ran," Adrian said, laying both hands on his brother's shoulders.

Randal threw up his head, excited, expectant, apprehensive.

"She is here,—one of the passengers of the *Cherokee Rose*."

"She?" exclaimed Randal in blank mystification.  
"Who?"

Adrian was embarrassed. It seemed as if even an old love could hardly be of so sluggish a divination,—as if Randal must have probed his meaning.

He reflected that it might be some keenly sensitive consciousness that could not yet bear the open recognition of the facts. Between them the subject of the sudden jilting had never been mentioned, save in Randal's one letter apprising his brother that the engagement was off, by reason of the lady's change of mind, which came, indeed, later than the item in the Paris journals, chronicling news of interest to Americans sojourning abroad, and giving details of a new betrothal in a circle of great wealth and position. He himself had never known such frenzy of emotion, of rage, and humiliation, and compassion, and pride. The event had racked him with vicarious woe. It had dealt him a wound that would not heal, but now and again burst into new and undreamed of phases of anguish. Even yet he shrank from taking her name on his lips—and to Randal himself, of all people. Yet Randal must be told,—he must not meet her unaware. The pause of indecision continued so long as they stood thus, Adrian's hands on his brother's shoulders, that Randal's eyes dilated with a surprise obviously unaffected. He lifted his own hands to his brother's elbows, and thus facing each other he said: "What of it? I am in a hurry,—I want to see that release. Who is this 'she'?"

"Why, Randal,—it is Mrs. Floyd-Rosney,—Paula Majoribanks, that was, and her husband and child."

There was still a pause, blank of significance.

"Well," said Randal, meditatively, at length, "they won't like that quit-claim paper one little bit of a bit." There was a laugh in his brilliant hazel eyes, and it touched the finely cut corners of his

lips. His fresh face was as joyous, as candid, as full of the tender affection of this reunion as if no word of a troubled past had been spoken to jar it.

Oh, that she should come between them on this day when they were so close to each other, Adrian reflected, when absence had made each so dear, when there was so much to say and to do, when separation impended, and time was so short. He felt that he could hardly endure to have their mutual pleasure marred, that he could not brook to see Randal abashed in her presence, and conscious, disconcerted and at a disadvantage before her husband. Above all, and before all, he winced for Randal's pain in the reopening of these poignant old wounds to bleed and ache anew.

His arms tightened and slipped up from his brother's shoulders and around his neck. "Oh, Randal, will it hurt you much?"

Randal looked grave. "A lawsuit is always a troublesome, long-drawn-out bother; I shrink from the suspense and the expense. But I am mighty glad to have the chance to be hurt that way."

"Oh, I meant will it give you pain to meet Paula again as Mrs. Floyd-Rosney?"

"*What?*" Randal's hearty young voice rang out with a note of amazement. "Not a bit. What do you take me for?"

"I was afraid—you would feel," faltered Adrian.

"Is that what's the matter with you? You look awfully muffish."

"Well,—as you loved her once,—I thought——"

"That was a case of mistaken identity," said Randal. "Can't you realize that it is just because she

*could* prefer another man; that she could think a thought of change; that her plighted faith could be broken; that her love,—or what we called love,—could take unto itself wings and fly away; that she was only an illusion, a delusion, a snare. I never loved the woman she is."

"She is very beautiful," hesitated Adrian.

"When I thought her mind and heart matched her face she seemed beautiful to me, too," said Randal.

"You will think so still."

"Kid, you know nothing about love. A man truly in love may have been attracted by beauty, but it is not that which holds him. It is a unity of soul; he finds a complement of mind; he has a sense of sympathy and, through thick and thin, a partisan, constant faith in a reciprocal heart. He gets used to the prettiest face and it makes little impression on him,—just as he wouldn't notice, after a time, a fine costume. She is nothing that I imagined. She is not now, and she never was the ideal I loved. I don't regret her. Don't grieve for me, little boy. And now will you be so kind as to take those paws off my neck,—you are half strangling me with your fraternal anxiety. Behold, I will smite you under the fifth rib."

There was once more a brief, boyish scuffle. Then the two turned and came walking decorously back to the group on the portico. The exterior aspect of the old ruin had an added majesty by daylight, despite the more obvious injuries of wreckage. Its fine proportions, the blended elegance and stateliness of its design, the richness even in the restraint of its ornamentation, all showed with telling effect, apart from the wild work within of the marauders.

These details the rude usage it had received could not affect. It might have stood as an imposing architectural example of a princely residence of the date of its erection, and it was impossible to gaze upon it with a sense of possessing it, and feel no glow of gratulation.

"Why, the item of glass alone would be a corker," a practical man was saying, walking backward down the stone pavement and surveying the great black gaps of the shattered windows.

The two brothers cast a meaning glance at each other, the discussion, of which this was obviously a fragment, evidently looked to a rehabilitation of the mansion under a change of owners, for, certainly, it would seem that Floyd-Rosney had neither the interest nor the associations to induce him to set up his staff of rest here. It was only a straw, but it showed how the wind of opinion set, and the brothers were in the frame of mind to discern propitious omens. The sun was bright on the overgrown spaces of the lawn. The Cherokee rose hedge that divided it from the family graveyard, and continued much further, had spread with its myriad unpruned sprangles beyond the space designed for a boundary, growing many feet wide. Beneath the great arch it described stretched a long tunnel-like arbor, throughout its whole extent, dark, mystic, in the shadow of its evergreen leaves. By reason of some natural attraction which quaint nooks have for children, Marjorie and little Ned had discovered this strange passageway, and were running in and out of the darksome space, with their shrilly sweet cries of pretended fright and real excitement, each time venturing a little farther than

before. The mists had lifted from the river, which spread a broad, rippling surface of burnished copper in the sunshine under an azure sky. There was no sign of approaching craft, no curl of smoke above the woods beyond the point to herald deliverance by a steamboat. One of the old ladies had established herself on her suitcase on the topmost step of the flight from the portico, and it would, indeed, have been a swift steamer that could have escaped her vigilance and passed without being signaled.

Adrian paused good-naturedly. "You need give yourself no uneasiness, madam,—it will require half an hour's time at least for a steamboat to pass this place from the moment that she is sighted," he said, in polite commiseration.

But the old lady sat tight. "They tell me there is a crazy man in there," she declared lugubriously. She would leave by the first opportunity.

"He is going presently in a phaeton across the country," Adrian explained. "There is no possible danger from him, however,—he has only occasional attacks. He is perfectly at himself to-day. But he will not be going on the boat." This remark was unlucky, as it increased her anxiety to embark.

Randal had lifted his hat after a moment's pause, and passed on without his brother. He hesitated, looked back, then entered the vestibule, and came suddenly face to face with Paula.

It had been five years since they had met and then it was as lovers. She had not dreamed of seeing him here. She thought him ten miles away at Caxton. She had never been more brilliantly, more delicately beautiful. Her burnished redundant hair that was wont to resemble gold, and to seem so elabo-

rately tended, had now a luminous fibrous effect at the verges of the smooth pompadour roll that had been hastily tossed up from her forehead. She even appeared taller, more slender than usual, since she wore a clinging gown of princess effect, in one piece, and, obviously, of matutinal usage, in more conventional surroundings. The flowing sleeve showed her bare arm from the elbow, exquisitely white and soft. The V-shaped neck gave to view her delicate snowy throat rising from a mist of lace. The strange large flower-pattern cast over a ground of thick sheeny white was an orchid with a gilded verge, and in the mauve and pearl tones she, too, looked like some rare and radiant bloom. Her eyes were sweet and expectant—her step swift. She was on her way to call back the child. She paused suddenly, dumfounded, disconcerted, confronted with the past.

She recognized Randal in one instant, despite his resemblance to his brother, and for her life she could not command her countenance. It was alternately red and white in the same moment. She felt that his confusion would heighten hers, yet she could not forgive his composure, his well-bred, graceful, gracious manner, his clear, vibrant, assured voice when he exclaimed, holding out his hand: "Mrs. Floyd-Rosney—this is an unexpected pleasure. I have this moment heard that you are here. Is that your husband?" For Floyd-Rosney had just issued from the dining-room and was advancing down the hall toward her with an unmistakable, connubial frown. "Will you kindly present me?"

It seemed for a moment as if Floyd-Rosney had never heard of the simple ceremony of an introduc-

tion. Paula could not secure and hold his attention. He passed Randal over with a casual, unnoting glance, and began to take her to task in no measured terms.

"Why do you allow the child to chase back and forth in that dark tunnel under the Cherokee rose hedge? He will be scratched to pieces by the briars, the first thing you know. Why is he with that mad-cap tom-boy, Marjorie Ashley? Where is his nurse, anyhow?"

"Why, she is completely knocked out by the fatigue and excitements,—she is quite old, you remember," said Paula meekly, seeking to stem his tide of words. "I was just coming out to play nurse myself. But stop a minute. I want to——"

"I won't stop a minute,—I don't care what you want,"—her aspect suddenly seemed to strike his attention. "And why do you trick yourself out in such duds at such a time?"

"Because this is so easy to put on,—and I had to dress the baby," Paula was near to tears. "But I want to——" she mended the phrase,—"This is Mr. Ducie; he wishes to meet you."

Floyd-Rosney turned his imperious gaze on Ducie with a most unperceiving effect. "Why, of course, I know it is Mr. Ducie,—have you taken leave of your senses, Paula? Mr. Ducie and I have seen enough of each other on this trip to last us the rest of our natural existence. I can't talk to you now, Mr. Ducie,—if you have anything to say to me you can communicate it to my lawyers; I will give you their address."

"It is not business. It is an introduction," explained Paula, in the extremity of confusion, while

Randal, placid and impassive, looked on inscrutably. "Mr. Ducie wishes to make your acquaintance."

"Well, he has got it,—if that is any boon," Floyd-Rosney stared at her, stupefied.

"But this is the brother,—Mr. Randal Ducie,—the one you have never met." In Paula's haste to elude her husband's impatient interruption she could scarcely speak. Her mouth was full of words, but they tripped and fell over each other in her agitation with slips and grotesque mispronunciations.

"Hoh!" said Floyd-Rosney, permitting himself to be enlightened at last. "Why this thing of twin brothers is no end of a farce." He shook hands with Randal with some show of conventionality. He, too, was mindful of the past. But so impatient was his temperament with aught that did not suit his play that he was disposed to cavil on the probabilities. "Are you sure,"—then he paused.

"That I am myself,—reasonably sure," said Randal, laughing. And now that Adrian was coming in at the door Floyd-Rosney surveyed them both as they stood together with a sort of disaffected but covert arrogance.

"Well—I can see no sort of difference," he declared.

"Oh, the difference is very obvious," said Paula, struggling to assert her individuality.

"I should thank no man for taking the liberty of looking so much like me," said Floyd-Rosney, seeking to compass a casual remark. Indeed, but for the pressure of old associations, the necessity of taking into consideration the impression made upon the by-standers, all conversant, doubtless, with the former relations of the parties, for several passers-

by had paused, attracted by the opportunity for the comparison of the twins side by side, Floyd-Rosney would have dismissed the Messrs. DUCIE and their duplicate countenance with a mere word.

"I didn't expect we should keep up the resemblance," remarked Adrian. "While I was abroad I did not know what Randal was getting to look like, and, therefore, I didn't know which way to look myself. But now that we are together we each have the advantage of a model."

The broker seemed to gravely ponder this strange statement, the others laughed, and Paula saw her opportunity to terminate the *contretemps*. "I'll call the baby in," she said, and slipped deftly past and out into the sunshine.

Paula's instinct was to remove the cause of her husband's irritation, not because she valued Floyd-Rosney's peace of mind or hoped to reinstate his pose of dignity. But she could not adjust herself to her habitual humility with him in Randal DUCIE's presence,—to listen to his instruction, to accept his rebukes, to obey his commands, to laugh at his vague and infrequent jests, to play the abased jackal to his lion. She would efface herself; she would be null; she would do naught to bring down wrath on her devoted head,—but beyond this her strength was inadequate. So she hustled the two children into the house and up the stairs, and out of the great front windows of the hall where she told them to stand on the balcony above the heads of the group below and watch for the appearance of a boat.

Now and then their sweet, reedy tones floated down as they conversed with each other at the extreme limit of their vocal pitch, breaking, occasion-

ally, into peals of laughter. Their steps sounded like the tread of half a dozen pairs of feet, so rapidly and erratically they ran back and forth. At intervals they paused and stood at the iron balustrade, surveying the scene from every point of view, up the river and down the river, and again across, in the zealous discharge of their delegated duty to watch for a boat. Below reigned that luxurious sense of quiet which ensues on the cessation of a turbulent commotion. Groups strolled to and fro on the portico, or found seats on the broad stone sills of the windows that opened upon it. Paula, in her white and lilac floriated house-dress, walked a little apart, pausing occasionally and glancing up to caution the two children on the balcony to be wary how they leaned their weight on the grillwork of the iron balustrade, as some rivet might be rusted and weakened.

Hildegarde had found her rough gray suit impracticable because of the drenching rains of yesterday and was freshly arrayed in a very chic street costume of royal blue broadcloth, trimmed with bands of chinchilla fur, with a muff and hat to match. She was standing near a window, on the sill of which the Major, wrapped in a rug and his overcoat, was ensconced, having been brought forth for a breath of air. He had a whimsical look of discovery on his pallid and wrinkled face. She was recalling to him a world which he had forgotten so long ago that it had all the flavor of a new existence.

"I can't give you any idea of the scenery *en route*, Major,"—she was describing a trip to the far west,—"in fact I slept the whole way. You see, my social duties were very onerous last spring. Our club had

determined to give twelve dinner dances during the season, and the weather became hot unusually early, and so many people were leaving town that as we were pledged to twelve we were compelled to give four of the dinner dances during the last week and my head was in a whirl. There was the Adelantado ball, too, and several very elaborate luncheons, and two or three teas every afternoon, and what between the indigestion and the two-step lumbago I was in a state of collapse on the journey west."

"That was a novel campaign," remarked the old soldier.

"It was a forced march," declared Hildegarde. "I didn't revive until I heard dance music again in the Golden City. Let me prop your head up against the window frame on my muff, Major. Oh, yes, it is very pretty,—all soft gray and white." She made a point of describing everything in detail for his sightless vision. "You might get a nap in this fresh air,—for it is a 'pillow muff.' Yes, indeed," watching his trembling fingers explore its soft densities, "it is very fine, but I won't mention the awful sum it cost my daddy lest such a conscienceless pillow give you the nightmare."

The air had all that bland luxurious quality so characteristic of the southern autumn. A sense was rife in the sunlit spaces of a suspension of effort. The growths of the year were complete; the inception of the new was not yet in progress. No root stirred; there was never a drop of sap distilled; not a twig felt the impetus of bourgeonning anew. Naught was apposite to the season save some languorous dream, too delicate, too elusive even for memory. It touched the lissome grace of the wil-

low-wands, bare and silvery and flickering in the imperceptible zephyrs. It lay, swooning with sweetness, in the heart of a late rose which found the changing world yet so kind that not a petal wilted in fear of frost. It silvered the mists and held them shimmering and spellbound here and there above the shining pearl-tinted water. It was not summer, to be sure, but the apotheosis of the departing season. Those far gates of the skies were opening to receive the winged past, and, surely, some bright reflection of a supernal day had fallen most graciously on all the land.

"For my part, since that deal is over and done with by this time, I don't care how long I have to wait for a boat,—it can neither mar nor make so far as I am concerned," said the broker, as he puffed his cigar and walked with long, meditative strides up and down the stone pavement.

Floyd-Rosney did not concur in this view. He had expected all the early hours that some of the neighboring negroes would come to the house, attracted by the rumors of the commotions enacted there during the night. Thus he could hire a messenger to take a note or a telephone message to the nearest livery establishment and secure a conveyance for himself and family to the railroad station some ten miles distant. He feared that hours, nay a day or so, might elapse before one of the regular packets plying the river might be expected to pass. Those already in transit had, doubtless, "tied up" during the storm, and now waited till the current should compass the clearance of the débris of the hurricane floating down the river. The steamers advertised to leave on their regular dates had not

cast off, in all probability, but lay supine in their allotted berths till the effects of the storm should be past, and thus would not be due here for twelve or twenty-four hours, according to the distance of their point of departure.

As, however, time went on and the old house stood all solitary in the gay morning light as it had in the sad moon-tide, Floyd-Rosney reflected that no one had gone forth from the place except the robbers and the roustabouts who had rowed the party down from the *Cherokee Rose*, returning thither immediately. It was, therefore, improbable that any rumor was rife of the temporary occupation of the Duciehurst mansion. Hence the absence of curiosity seekers. Moreover, even were the circumstances known, every human creature in the vicinity with the capacity to stand on its feet and open and close its fingers was in the cotton fields this day, for the sun's rays had already sufficiently dried off the plant, and the industry of cotton-picking, even more than time and tide, waits for nobody. For "cotton is money,—maybe more, maybe less, but cotton is money *every time*," according to the old saying. These snowy level fields were rich with coin of the republic. The growing staple was visible wealth, scarcely needing the transmuting touch of trade. No! of all the wights whom he might least expect to see it was any cotton-picker, old or young, of the region.

There being, evidently, no chance of a messenger, he had half a mind, as his impatience of the detention increased, to go himself in search of means of telephonic communication. But, apart from his spirit of leisure and his habit of ease, his prejudices

were dainty, and he looked upon the miry richness of the Mississippi soil as if it were insurmountable. To be sure, now and again he affected a day of sylvan sport, when, with dog and gun, he cared as little as might be for mud, or rain, or sleet, or snow; but then, he was caparisoned as a Nimrod, and burrs and briars, stains and adhesive mire, were all the necessary accessories, and of no consideration. In his metropolitan attire to step out knee deep in a soil made up of river detritus, the depth and blackness of which are the boast and glory of the cotton belt, was scarcely to be contemplated if an alternative was possible.

Suddenly a cry smote the air with electrical effect.  
"A boat! A boat!"

## CHAPTER XI

THE auspicious announcement came first from the balcony. Then the cry "A boat! A boat!" was taken up by the group on the portico, and echoed by those within, pouring out in eager expectation through the vestibule or the windows that opened to the floor. Floyd-Rosney experienced a moment of self-gratulation on his prudential hesitation. He might have otherwise been half a mile off, plunging through slough and switch-cane, or the sharp serrated blades of the growths of saw-grass that edged the lake, before he could gain the smooth ways of the turnrows of the cotton fields. All knew that considerable time must needs elapse from the moment the boat was sighted, far up the river, before it could pass this point. But shawls were strapped, gloves, wraps, hats, gathered together, toilet articles tumbled hastily into Gladstone bags, trunks and suit-cases. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, with incomparable quickness, had shifted into a gown of taupe cloth, with a coat to match, and with a large hat, trimmed with ostrich plumes of the same shade, on her golden hair, in lieu of the rain-drenched traveling attire of yesterday.

After a few moments of this pandemonium of preparation all eyes were turned toward the river. Vacant it was, sunlit, a certain play of the swift current betokening the added impetus of the recent

heavy rainfall and the influx of its swollen tributaries from the region to the northward. Not even a coil of smoke showed above the forest where the river curved.

"The packet must be rounding the point," said Floyd-Rosney hopefully.

"Did you see the smoke above the trees, darling?" Paula called out to the eager little man, now racing joyfully about the balcony, now pausing to point at an object in the offing with his tiny forefinger.

"No, mamma; the boat; the boat!"

Marjorie, leaning on the iron rail, was gazing with eager eyes in vain search.

"It seems to me that we ought to be able to see the boat from the portico as soon as he can from the balcony," said the broker.

An adequate reason was presently presented for the advantage of the balcony as an outlook, lifted so high above the portico.

The boat lay very flat on the surface,—a shanty-boat!

"Why, Eddie," cried Marjorie, with an inflection of poignant disappointment,—she, too, had been looking for the towering chimneys, the coil of black smoke, backward blown in the smooth progress of a packet, the white guards, the natty little pilot-house, and only casually she had chanced to descry the tiny flat object drifting with the current that carried it far in toward the point. "That is a shanty-boat,—we don't travel on that kind of boat."

The child's pink and white face was crestfallen in a moment. Language seemed to fail him as he gazed disconsolate. Then he sought reassurance.

"Him *is* a boat," he declared with his pointing forefinger, so small in contrast with the vast spaces he sought to index. "Him *is* a boat, *ain't* him, mamma?"

"Him *is*, indeed, a boat," cried out Paula. "Never mind," for little Ned's head was drooping, "we shall get a bigger boat presently. And it was you that saw the first one!"

"Get him down from there, Paula," said Floyd-Rosney, greatly discomposed. "Set him at some other mischief, for God's sake,—anything but this."

"He *is* coming now," she answered, glimpsing the rueful little face through the balusters of the stairs within, and, presently, the whole diminutive figure came into view as he descended, always the right foot first, and only one step at a time, so high were the intervals for his fat baby legs.

"The poor child," Paula suddenly exclaimed, the tears springing. "There just seems to be no place for him."

Floyd-Rosney obviously felt the rebuke. He winced for a moment. Then he justified himself.

"To have twenty people on the *qui vive* for a boat and then disappoint them with that silly prank,—it is out of the question."

"It was no prank,—he meant no harm," said Paula in abashed discomfiture. "I had told him to watch for a boat merely to keep him out of the way. I didn't think to explain that it was to be a steam-boat for us to board."

"Then you ought to have more consideration for other people," Floyd-Rosney fumed.

His strong point was scarcely altruism, but he

probably felt the misadventure even more sensibly than any of the others, for he was accustomed to lording it in a fine style and in a fine sphere. There was no lack of indicia of displeasure among the thwarted travelers as they strolled in baffled irritation up and down the stone floor of the portico, and gazed along the glittering river at the slow approach of the shanty-boat, now drifting as noiselessly and apparently as aimlessly on the lustrous surface as a sere leaf on a gust of wind, and now, with its great sweeps, working to keep the current from carrying it in and grounding it on the bank. The old lady who had entertained fears of the insane man was both peevishly outspoken and addicted to covert innuendo.

"I declare it has given me a turn,—I am subject to palpitation." She put her hand with a gingerly gesture to the decorous passamanerie on her chest that outlined her embroidered lawn guimpe. "Shocks are very bad for any cardiacal affection. Oh, of course," a wan and wintry smile at once of acceptance and protest as Paula expressed her vicarious contrition, "the child didn't intend any harm, but it only shows the truth of the old saw that children should be seen and not heard." She could not be placated, and she sighed plaintively as she once more sat down on her suitcase on the steps of the portico.

The men had less to say, but were of an aspect little less morose. Even the broker, whose heart had warmed to the sunshine, felt it a hardship that he should not have the boon at least of knowing how the deal had gone. A grim laugh, here and there, betokened no merriment and was of sarcas-

tic intimations that touched the verge of rudeness. The business interests of more than one were liable to suffer by prolonged absence, and the ruefulness of disappointment showed in several countenances erstwhile resolutely cheerful.

Paula, to escape further disaffected comment, had turned within, perceiving, at a distance, Hildegarde coming down the hall, gazing intently on a little forked stick, carried stiffly before her in both hands, the eyes of a group hard by fixed smilingly upon her mysterious progress. Randal Ducie suddenly entered from one of the rooms on the left, where he and his brother had been examining the rescued papers.

Was it because Paula was so accustomed to the vicarious preëminence which her husband's wealth and prominence had conferred upon her that she should experience a sentiment of revolt upon discerning the surprise and accession of interest in Randal Ducie's face as his eyes passed from her and fixed themselves on Hildegarde—or was it because she still arrogated instinctively her quondam hold upon his heart? Had she never consciously loosed it?—or, while he had escaped its coercions, were they still potential with her? Why should she wince and redden as, with his hat in his hand, he advanced instantly to meet Miss Dean, who seemed not to see him and to cavalierly ignore his presence.

“Why, won't you speak to me?” he demanded, smiling.

Her casual glance seemed to pass him over. She was intent upon the little forked stick. “What do you want me to say to you?” she asked, not lifting

her radiant blue eyes, half glimpsed beneath her lowered black lashes.

"Good morning, at least," replied Randal.

"How many greetings do you require? Upon my word, the man has forgotten that he has seen me earlier to-day. I wished you a 'good morning' at that very delectable breakfast table."

"Oh, that must have been my brother," said Randal, enlightened. "This is I, myself, Randal Ducie."

"You had better beware how you try your fakes on me. You don't know what magic power I have in this little divining-rod. I will tell you presently to go and look into your strong box and find all your jewels and gold turned to pebbles, and your title-deeds cinders and blank paper."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Floyd-Rosney unpleasantly. "The blind goddess will undertake that little transformation." His imperious temper could scarcely brook the perception that the coterie regarded the Duccies as restored to the ownership of their ancient estates, even while he stood in the hall of the house he held by the decree of the courts.

But Hildegarde did not hear or heed. Bent on her frivolous fun, she brushed past Ducie, holding her divining-rod stiffly in her dainty fingers. Her eyes were alight with laughter as she exclaimed in a voice agitated with affected excitement, "Oh, it's turning! It's turning! I shall find silver in one more moment. Oh, Major, Major," she brought the twig up against the old soldier's breast. "Here it is—silver—in the Major's waistcoat pocket!"

She fell back against the great newel of the staircase, laughing ecstatically, while all the idle group

looked on with amused sympathy, save only the two Floyd-Rosneys. The wife's face was disconcerted, almost wry, with the affected smile she sought to maintain, as she watched Ducie's glowing expression of admiration, and the husband's gravity was of baleful significance as he watched her.

"I have found silver! I have found silver! Now, Major, stand and deliver." As the trembling fingers of the veteran obediently explored the pocket and produced several bits of money, they were hailed with acclamations by the discoverer, till she suddenly espied a coin with a hole in it. "Oh, Major," she cried, in genuine enthusiasm. "Give me this dime!"

"Oh, Hildegarde,"—Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's face assumed an expression of reprobation, but Mrs. Dean only laughed at the childish freak.

"I will have it,—it won't make or break the Major—I want it—to wear as a bangle, to remind me of this lovely trip, and all that the Major and I have plotted, and contrived, and conspired together. Eh, Major? Oh,—thanks,—thanks,—muchly. You may have the rest, Major." And she tucked the remaining coins back into his pocket, smiling brightly the while up into his sightless eyes.

Randal Ducie, with an air of sudden decision, turned about, seized his brother by the arm and together they stood before the joyous young beauty, who was obviously beginning to canvass mentally the next possibility of amusement under these unpropitious circumstances.

"Now, Miss Dean, be pleased to cast your eyes over us. I am not going to allow this fellow to deprive me of your valuable acquaintance."

"Oh, pick me out, Miss Dean," cried Adrian

plaintively. "I am all mixed up. I don't know if I am myself or my brother."

Miss Dean stared from one to the other, her brilliant eyes wide with wonder.

"How perfectly amazing!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, how did you distinguish and recognize one of them Thursday afternoon?"

Paula's mind was so engrossed that, quick as she was always to discern the fluctuations of favor in her husband's disposition toward her, she had not observed his peculiar notice of the fact of her retentive memory and keen perception in distinguishing the veiled identity of the man who had once been dear to her,—once?

"Oh, I saw the difference instantly," she declared, with what her husband considered an undignified glibness, and an interest especially unbecoming in a matter so personal, which should be barred to her by the circumstances. "This is Randal, and this is Mr. Adrian Ducie."

Indeed, they all noticed, with varying sentiments, the familiar use of the Christian name, but only Adrian spoke in his debonair fashion.

"Right-o! I begin to breathe once more. I was afraid I was going to have to be Randal."

Miss Dean was still studying the aspect of the two brothers. "I believe you are correct, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney," she said slowly. "For this one, Mr. Adrian Ducie, is just from France, and he has on Paris-made shoes,—I know the last. It is the *dernier cri*."

There was a general laugh.

"Blessed Saint Crispin! I'll make a votive offering!" cried Adrian. "Now, Randal, you stay

away from me," with a vigorous push of his brother at arm's length, "so that this mix-up can't happen again."

"I'll borrow his shoes when he is asleep and he will never know himself any more!" said Randal vindictively.

There was a sudden cheerful acclaim from the portico without. A boat had been sighted, slowly rounding the point, a packet of the line this time, and all was bustle preparatory to embarkation. Even now the whistle, husky, loud, widely blaring, filled the air, signaling the approaching landing, the Captain having received information when passing the *Cherokee Rose* of the plight of the refugees. The next moment they were sheepishly laughing, for the steamer, the *Nixie*, was sending forth a second blast, a prolonged whining shriek, the signal known on the river as a "begging whistle" by which boats solicit patronage in passengers or freight, and which is usually sounded only when there is a doubt whether a stoppage is desired.

Humoring the joke at their expense, the refugees made a vigorous reply, waving handkerchiefs, raising hats on umbrellas and canes, hallooing lustily, as they wended their way down the pavement, over the ruined embankment of the old levee, along the grass-grown road and to the brink of the bank, seeming high and precipitous at this stage of the river. They were well in advance of the stoppage of the steamer, although, as she came sweeping down the current, the constantly quickening beat of her paddles on the water could be heard at a considerable distance in that acceleration of speed always preliminary to landing. They watched all her

motions with an eagerness to be off as if some chance could yet snatch the opportunity from their reach,—the approach, the backing, the turning, the renewed approach, all responsive to the pilot-bells jangling keenly on the air. Then ensued the gradual cessation of the pant of the engines, the almost imperceptible gliding to actual stoppage, as the *Nixie* lay in the deep trough of the channel of the river, the slow swinging of the staging from the pulleys suspended above the lower deck. The end of the frame had no sooner been laid on the verge of the high bank than the refugees were trooping eagerly down its steep, cleated incline to the lower deck as if the steamer would touch but a moment and then forge away again.

The *Nixie* was sheering off, thus little delayed, to resume her downward journey and the passengers had begun to gather on the promenade deck when Miss Dean encountered Adrian Ducie. She stopped short at the sight of him. "Why, where is the other one of you?" she exclaimed.

"He remained at Duciehurst. I have pressing business in Vicksburg,—my stoppage, as you know, was involuntary. I shall return later."

"Oh, I don't like to see you apart."

"If you would take a little something now," he said alluringly, "you might see double. Then the freak brothers would be all right again."

"But the parting must be very painful after such a long separation," she speculated.

"We shed a couple of tears," and Adrian wagged his head in melancholy wise.

"Oh, you turn everything into ridicule,—even your fraternal affection," she said reproachfully.

"Would you have me fall to weeping in sad earnest? Besides, the parting is only for a day or so. I shall take the train at Vicksburg and rejoin him."

"And where is Mrs. Floyd-Rosney?" she asked, looking about.

"She, too, remained at Duciehurst," said one of the sour old ladies.

Adrian rose precipitately. The boat, headed downstream, was now in the middle of the channel, and he gazed at the rippling, shimmering expanse as if he had it in mind to attempt its transit. Here, at all events, was something which he did not turn into ridicule. The great house beyond its ruinous levee rose majestically into the noontide sunlight, all its disasters and indignities effaced by the distance. The imposing, pillared portico, the massive main building with its heavy cornice, the broad wings, the stone-coped terraces, all were distinct and differentiated, amidst the glossy magnolias that, sempervirent, aided its aspect of reviviscence, with a faint autumnal haze softening its lines, and the brilliant corrugated surface of the river in the foreground.

He stood gazing vainly upon it, as it seemed to recede into the distance, till, presently, the boat rounded a point and it vanished like an unsubstantial mirage, like a tenuous mist of the morning.

## CHAPTER XII

IT was through no will of her own that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had remained at Duciehurst. She had been eager and instant in the preparations for departure as soon as the approach of the boat was heralded. She had aided the old nurse with convulsive haste by hustling the baby's effects into his suitcase, jamming his cap down on his head and shaking him into his coat with little ceremony. She had seen from the broken windows of the deserted music-room the Ducie brothers, the last of all the procession of travelers, wending down toward the great white shell in the river slowly approaching, throwing off the foam in wreaths on each side. The two men walked shoulder to shoulder; now and again they paused to confer; then going on; and there was something so affectionate in their look and attitude, almost leaning on one another, so endearing in the way in which one would lay his hand on the other's arm that tears sprang to her eyes, and, for the moment, she felt that nothing was worth having in the world but the enduring affection of a simple heart, which asks naught but love in return.

The momentary weakness was gone as it had come. She could feel only elation—to be going, to get out of the house of Randal Ducie, which she had entered with reluctance, even when she had doubted

his claim, and now that it had been proved valid in fact, if not in law, she could scarcely wait to be quit of it.

In the hall, as she flustered forth—as Floyd-Rosney would have described her agitated movements—she was astonished to come upon her husband, placidly pacing up and down, his deliberate cigar between his lips, his hands clasped behind him.

“Why, dear,”—she used the connubial address from force of habit, for her voice was crisp and keenly pitched—“aren’t you ready?”

“Seems not,” he said, looking at her enigmatically.

“But we shall be left!” she exclaimed.

“Exactly.” He took his cigar from his mouth and emitted a puff of fragrant nicotian.

He was wont to consult his own whims, but hitherto her supine acquiescence had been actuated less by a realization of helplessness than endorsement of his right of mastery, his superior and prevailing will. She thought of her submissiveness at the moment.

How she had loved money! His money, of which she had enjoyed such share as he saw fit to dole forth. All the stiffness, the induration of long custom was at war with her impulse as she cried:

“But I want to go! What do you mean by staying here?”

“But I want to stay,” he said imperiously, “and that is what I mean, and all I mean.”

This was hardly comprehensive. He could scarcely control the rage that from the first of this ill-omened detention had possessed him upon the discovery of her lingering interest in the face of her

old lover—a simple matter and explicable; without latent significance it would have been in the mind of any other man. Had it involved no sequence of subsequent events even he, perhaps, would have brought himself to let it pass unconsidered. He could not expect her to forget the fashion of Randal Ducie's features, and the presence of the twin brother conjured up his face anew—his face which she had subtly distinguished from its counterpart. That revolted his pride. His wife must have no thought, no care, no memory, even, for aught save him! But her protest as to his ownership of Duciehurst, her revolt against owing any phase of her prosperity to the misfortunes of the Duccies, argued latent sensitiveness, an unprobed wound that he had not suspected, thoughts that he could not divine, memories that he did not share. Never, in all his experience of her, had her individuality, or even a question of his authority, been asserted save since that remembered face reappeared, affecting their matrimonial accord—he, imperious to command, from his plenitude of wealth and power, she eager to fawn and obey.

“You don't consider me at all. You don't consult my wishes.”

“I do better, my love. I consult our mutual interests.”

“You treat me like a child, an idiot! You let me know nothing of our plans. Why should we not leave this battered old ruin with the rest of the passengers? How and when are we to leave? If, for nothing but to make a decent response to Aunt Dorothy's questions, I ought to be told something. I hardly know how to face her.”

"Well *I* am not posing for that old darkey's benefit," he said, satirically smiling.

There was a pause full of expectancy.

"This battered old ruin!" he exclaimed. "It will be the finest mansion in Mississippi by the time I am through with it."

He cast his imperative eyes in approval over the great spaces of its open apartments. "And you, my dear, will be proud to be its chatelaine, and dispense its hospitalities."

"Never," she cried impetuously—"an abasement of pride for me!"

He changed color for a moment, and then held his ground.

"The ante-bellum glories will be revived in a style that has not been attempted in this country."

"The ante-bellum glories—that were the Duccies'," she said, with a flushed face and a flashing eye.

He was of so imperious a personality that he seldom encountered rebuke or contradiction. He was of such potential endowments that effort was unknown and failure was annihilated in his undertakings. He scarcely understood how he should deal with this unprecedented insolence, this revolt on the part of the being who had seemed to him most devoted, most adoring. The incense of worship had been dear to him,—and now the worshiper had lapsed to revilings and sacrilege!

"Paula, you are a fool absolute," he said roughly.

"Ah, no—not I—not I!" she cried significantly.

She lifted her head with a quick motion. The boat at the landing was getting up steam. She heard the exhaust of the engines, then the sonorous beat

of the paddles on the water, and the swishing tumult of the waves as the wheels revolved.

"They are going," she cried, "and we are left!"

She turned to him in agitation. He stood, splendid in his arrogant assurance, in his unrelenting dominance, his fine presence befitting the great hall which he would so amply grace in its restored magnificence. It was well for him that he was so handsome. Such a man, less graciously endowed, would have been intolerable in his arrogance, his selfishness, his brutality.

He showed no interest in the departure at the landing; he knew, by the sound, that the steamboat was now well out in midstream, and he secretly congratulated himself upon the termination of this ill-starred revival of old associations with the Duccies. Never again should they cross his wife's path. Never again should he submit to the humiliation imposed upon him by the revival of old memories which had incited in her this strange restiveness to his supreme control. She had been wont to hug her chains—not that he thus phrased the gentle constraints he had imposed, rather wifely duty, conjugal love, admiration, trust.

The steamboat was gone at length, and his wife, standing in the hall and looking through the wide doorless portal, had seen the last of the passengers. Looking with a strange expression on her strained face which he could not understand,—what series of mysteries had her demeanor set him to interpret during these few hours, she who used to be so pellucidly transparent! Looking with frowning brow and questioning intent eyes, then with a suddenly clearing expression and a vindictive glance like triumph,

she turned away with an air of bridling dignity, as if the steamer and its passengers had no concern for her, and, the next moment, Randal Ducie ascended the steps and entered the hall.

## CHAPTER XIII

EDWARD FLOYD-ROSNEY in some sort habitually confused cause and effect. In his normal entourage he mistook the swift potencies of his wealth, waiting on his will, like a conjurer's magic, for an individual endowment of ability. He had great faith in his management. In every group of business men with whom his affairs brought him in contact his financial weight gave him a predominance and an influence which flattered his vanity, and which he interpreted as personal tribute, and yet he did not disassociate in his mind his identity from his income. His wealth was an integral part of him, one of the many great values attached to his personality—he felt that he was wise and witty, capable and coercive. He addressed himself to the manipulation of a difficult situation with a certainty of success that gave a momentum to the force with which his money carried all before him. So rarely had he been placed on a level with other men, in a position in which wealth and influence were inoperative, that he had had scant opportunities to appraise his own mental processes—his judgment, his initiative, his powers of ratiocination.

He did not feel like a fool when Randal Ducie walked deliberately into the hall of his fathers, staring in responsive surprise to see the Floyd-Rosneys still lingering there. That admission was im-

possible to Floyd-Rosney's temperament. He felt as if contemplating some revulsion of nature. He had seen this man among the crowd, boarding the steamer, and lo, here he was again, on dry land and the boat now miles distant.

He stood stultified, all his plans for the avoidance of Ducie strangely dislocated and set at naught by the unexpected falling out of events.

He was not calculated to bear tamely any crossing of his will, and the blood began to throb heavily in his temples with the realization that his wife had understood his clumsy maneuver, of which she was the subject, and witnessed its ludicrous discomfiture. His pride would not suffer him to glance toward her, where she sat perched up on the grand staircase, in the attitude of a coquettish girl. He curtly addressed Ducie:

“Thought you were gone!”

“No,” said Ducie, almost interrogatively, as to why this conclusion.

Floyd-Rosney responded to the intonation.

“I saw you going down to the landing.”

“To see my brother off.”

“Oh,—ah——”

What more obvious—what more natural? The one resumed his interrupted journey, and the other was to take up his usual course of life. That is, thought Floyd-Rosney, if this one is Randal Ducie. But, for some reason, they might have reversed the program, and this is the other one.

Floyd-Rosney struggled almost visibly for his wonted dominance, but Ducie had naught at stake on his favor, naught to give or to lose, and his manner was singularly composed and inexpressive—too well

bred to even permit the fear of counter questions as to why they lingered here and let the steamer leave without them. Perhaps, he felt such inquiries intrusive, for, after a moment, he turned away, and Floyd-Rosney still confronted him with eyes round and astonished and his face a flushed and uneasy mask of discomfiture.

Momentarily at a loss how to dispose of himself, DUCIE looked about the apartment, devoid of chairs or any furniture, and, finally, resorted to the staircase, taking up a position on one of the lower steps. Perhaps, had he known that the Floyd-Rosneys were within he would have lingered outside. But dignity forbade a retreat, although his disinclination for their society was commensurate with Floyd-Rosney's aversion to him and his brother. For his life Floyd-Rosney, still staring, could not decide which of the twain he had here, and Paula, with a perverse relish of his quandary, perceived and enjoyed his dilemma. Although he was aware she could discern the difference her manner afforded him no clew, as she sat silent and intentionally looking very pretty, to her husband's indignation, as he noted the grace of her studied attitude, her face held to inexpressive serenity, little in accord with the tumult of vexation the detention had occasioned her.

Floyd-Rosney could not restrain his questions. Perhaps they might pass with DUCIE as idle curiosity, although with Paula he had now no disguise.

"You are waiting——?"

"For my horse," returned DUCIE, with the accent of surprise. "There was no room in the phaeton for me, as Colonel Kenwynton and Major Lacey

concluded to accompany the doctor and his patient to the sanatorium."

So this was Randal Ducie, and the brother had resumed his journey down the river.

"The doctor promised to send the horse back for me——" he paused a moment. "I hope he will send the phaeton, too, for if you have made no other arrangements——" Once more he paused blankly—it seemed so strange that Floyd-Rosney should allow himself to be marooned here in this wise. "If you have made no other arrangements it will give me pleasure to drive you to the station near Glenrose."

"We are due at the sanatorium for the insane, I think," cried Paula, with her little fleering laugh, her chin thrust up in her satirical wont.

Floyd-Rosney, sore bestead and amazed by her manner, made a desperate effort to recover his composure.

"Oh, I sent a telegram by one of the passengers to be transmitted when the boat touches at the landing at Volney, and this will bring an automobile here for my family."

"If the passenger does not forget to send it, or if, when the boat touches he is not asleep, after his vigils here, or if he is not taking a walk, or eating his lunch, or, like Baal of old, otherwise engaged, when we, too, may cry Baal, Baal, unavailingly. For my part, I accept your offer, Mr. Ducie, if your vehicle comes first; if not I hope you will take a seat in the automobile with us."

"That is a compact," said Ducie graciously.

Floyd-Rosney felt assured that this was Randal. He was more suave than his brother—or was it that

old associations still had power to gentle his temper? He could not understand his wife's revolt. Now and again he looked at her with an unconscious inquiry in his eyes. So little was he accustomed to subject his own actions to criticism that it did not occur to him that he had gone too far. The worm had turned, seeming unaware how lowly and helpless was its estate. He had all the sentiment of grinding it under his heel, as he said loftily:

"We shall have no need to impose upon you, Mr. Ducie. Our own conveyance will be here in ample time,"—then, like a jaw-breaker—"Thanks."

"I march with the first detachment," declared Paula hardily. "I shall accept your offer of transportation, Mr. Ducie, if the auto does not come first."

Floyd-Rosney thought this must surely be Adrian Ducie, and not his brother. For some reason of their own they *must* have exchanged their missions, and Randal had gone down the river, leaving his brother here. For she—a stickler on small points of the appropriate—could never say this if it were her old lover. Her sense of decorum, her respect for her husband, her habitual exercise of good taste would alike forbid the suggestion. Doubtless, it was Adrian Ducie.

"I don't think an automobile will come," remarked Ducie. "The roads are very rough between here and Volney."

Paula's next words seemed to mend the matter a trifle in Floyd-Rosney's estimation.

"I think we have all had enough of Duciehurst for one time! I would not risk remaining here, as evening closes in, for any consideration. All the

riverside harpies will be flocking here when this story of treasure trove is bruited abroad. The old place will be fairly torn stone from stone, and there will be horrible orgies of strife and bloodshed. There ought to be a guard set, though there is nothing now to guard."

"Do you suppose Captain Treherne's story of the river pirates was all fact or was partly the effect of his hallucination?" Ducie asked.

"The cords he was bound with were pretty circumstantial evidence," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, not waiting, as usual, for her husband's word, but taking the lead in the conversation with aplomb and vivacity—he remembered scornfully that before her marriage she had been accounted in social circles intellectual, a *bel esprit* among the frivols.

"The gag failed of its function of silence," she continued, "it told the whole story. You would have known that it was stern truth if you had seen it."

Floyd-Rosney vacillated once more.

"This *must* be Randal Ducie," he thought, "for Adrian was present at the liberation of Captain Treherne—indeed, he was with the group searching among the series of ruined vacant apartments when the prisoner was discovered."

"The finding of the box was very singular," speculated Ducie, "the closest imaginable shave. It was just as possible to one of the parties on the verge of discovery as the other."

He was in that uneasy, disconcerted state of mind usual with a stranger present at a family discord which he feels, yet must not obviously perceive and cannot altogether ignore.

"It seems the hand of fate," said Paula.

"I went up to the third story this morning and looked at the place," remarked Randal. "I really don't see how, without tools, you contrived to wrench the heavy washboard away, and get at the bricks and the interior of the capital of the pilaster."

"It seems a feat more in keeping with Miss Dean," suggested Floyd-Rosney, "she has such a splendid physique."

"Hilda is as strong as a boy," declared Paula. "She does 'the athletic'—affects very boyish manners, don't you think?" she added, addressing Ducie directly.

There were few propositions which either of the Floyd-Rosneys could put forth with which Randal Ducie would not have agreed, so eager was he to close the incident without awkward friction. To let the malapropos encounter pass without result was the instinct of his good breeding. But, upon this direct challenge, he felt that he could not annul his individuality, his convictions.

"Why, not at all boyish," he said. "On the contrary, I think her manners are most feminine in their fascination. Did you notice that the old blind Major was having the time of his life?"

Floyd-Rosney, without the possibility of seating himself unless he, too, resorted to the stair, was pacing slowly back and forth, his head bent low, his hands lightly clasped behind him. Now and again he sent forth a keenly observant glance at the two disposed on the stair, like a couple of young people sitting out a dance at a crowded evening function.

"Hildegarde will flirt with anything or anybody when good material cannot be had," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, with a manner of vague discomfiture.

"Well, that is scarcely fair to my brother," said Randal. He would not let this pass.

"Oh, I should judge his flirting days are over," cried Paula, wilfully flippant. "He is as crusty as a bear with a sore head."

"Or a sore heart," said Randal, thinking of Adrian's long exile, and his hard fate, ousted from his home and fortune; then he could have bitten his tongue out, realizing the sentimental significance of the words. Still one cannot play with fire without burning one's fingers, and there are always embers among the ashes of an old flame.

For her life Paula could but look conscious with the eyes of both men on her face.

"He doesn't seem an exponent of a sore heart." She stumbled inexcusably in her clumsy embarrassment. There was an awkward silence. The implication that Adrian might be representative passed as untenable, and the subject of hearts was eschewed thereafter.

"Miss Dean has been quite famous as a beauty and belle in her brief career," Mr. Floyd-Rosney deigned to contribute to the conversation.

"She is wonderfully attractive—so original and interesting," said Ducie warmly.

"It seems to me Hilda carries her principal assets in her face," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney. "They say she wouldn't learn a thing at the convent—and what is worse, she feels no lack."

"What does any woman learn?" demanded Floyd-Rosney iconoclastically, "and what does any woman's education signify? A mosaic of worthless smattering, expensive to acquire, and impossible to

apply. Miss Dean lacks nothing in lacking this equipment."

Paula sat affronted and indignant. In her husband's sweeping assertion he had not had the courtesy to except her, and it was hardly admissible for Dicie to repair the omission. He could only carry the proposition further and make it general, and his tact seized the opportunity.

"I think that might be said of the youth of both sexes. The fakir, with his learning made-easy, is the foible of the age and its prototype extends to business methods—the get-rich-quick opportunities match the education-while-you-wait, and the art, reduced to a smudge with a thumb, and the ballads of a country—the voice of the heart of the people, superseded by ragtime."

But Paula would not be appeased.

"If women are constitutionally idiots and cannot be taught," she cried, "they ought not to be responsible for folly. That is a charter wide as the winds."

"Not at all—not at all," said her husband dogmatically. But how he would have reconciled the variant dicta of incapacity and accountability must remain a matter of conjecture, for there came suddenly on the air the iterative sound of the swift beat of hoofs and, through the open door in another moment, was visible a double phaëton drawn by a glossy, spirited blood bay, brought with difficulty to a pause and lifting alternately his small forefeet with the ardor of motion, even when the pressure on the bit in his mouth constrained his eager activity and brought him to a halt.

"I have won out," said Dicie genially. Since it had awkwardly fallen to his lot to offer civilities to

these people he did it with a very pretty grace. "I shall be glad to see you and your family to the station, Mr. Floyd-Rosney."

Floyd-Rosney's eyes were on the space beyond the portico.

"That's a good horse you have," he remarked seriously.

"Yes—before I bought him he was on the turf, —winner in several events."

"You don't often see such an animal in private use," said Floyd-Rosney, unbending a trifle. He, too, loved a good horse for its own sake.

"True, but I am located at a considerable distance from the plantations I lease, and going to and fro he is of special use to me. I can't stand a slow way of getting through the world, and the roads won't admit of an auto."

The two men were quite unconstrained for the moment in the natural interest of a subject foreign to their difficult mutual relations. Randal Ducie's head was thrown up, his eyes glowed; he was looking at the horse with a sort of glad admiration—an expression which Paula well remembered. Floyd-Rosney's eyes narrowed as they scanned successively the points of the fine animal, his own face calm, patronizing, approving. Neither of them, for the moment, was thinking of her. She had followed them out upon the wide stone portico and stood in the sun, her head tilted a trifle that her broad hat of taupe velvet might shade her eyes. She brought herself potently into the foreground, seizing the fact that Randal was unincumbered with baggage of any sort.

"Where is the treasure trove?" she cried. "Surely

you are not going to leave it in the ruins of this old mansion!"

Her husband flashed at her a glance of reproof which would once have silenced her, abashed to the ground. Now she repeated her words, wondering to feel so composed, so possessed of all her faculties. Without a conscious effort of observation the details of the scene were registered in her mind unbefogged by her wonted bewilderment in her husband's disapproval. She even noticed the groom who had driven the vehicle back from the livery stable—no colored servant, but a carrot-headed youth, with jockey boots, riding breeches, a long freckled face, and small red-lidded eyes, very close together, gazing at Ducie with a keen intentness as she asked the question. The fame of the discovery must have been bruited abroad already, and she vaguely wondered at this, for, as yet, no one on land knew the facts, except the alienist and his party, safely housed at the sanatorium.

"The chest of valuables found here last night?" replied Ducie. "Why, I haven't it. My brother took it on the boat in his suitcase, and, before night-fall, it will be in one of the banks in Vicksburg."

Floyd-Rosney, thrown out of all his reckonings by the unaccountable behavior of his wife, spoke at random, more to obviate its effects than with any valid intendment.

"I saw the box opened," he said; "only family jewels and a lot of gold coin and papers, but I should think, from the pretensions of this place, there must have been elaborate table services of silver, perhaps of gold plate. Were any such appurtenances hidden, do you know, and recovered?"

Ducie shook his head. "I know nothing of such ware. It may be, or it may not be here. The absence of the papers brought out the story of the hiding of the family diamonds, else the box would have remained in the capital of the pilaster, where my uncle left it, till the crack of doom."

Paula never understood the impulse that possessed her. Boldly, in the presence of her husband, she took from her dainty mesh bag a small key set with rubies and one large diamond.

"Your brother carelessly left one of the Ducie jewels on the table and I picked it up. I am so glad I remembered to restore it to you. It should have been in your possession long ago."

Floyd-Rosney was watching her like a hawk, and she began to quail before his eyes. Oh, why had she not remembered that he was a connoisseur in bijouterie and bric-à-brac of many sorts and would detect instantly, at a glance, the modern fashion and comparatively slight value of the trinket. More than all, why had she not reckoned on the fact that Randal Ducie was no actor. Who could fail to interpret the surprised recognition in his eyes, his gentle upbraiding look before the associations thus ruthlessly summoned? It was as if some magic had materialized all the tender poignancy of first love, all his winged hopes, all the heartbreak of a cruel disappointment crystallized in this scintillating bauble in his hand. He glanced from it to her, then back at the flashing stones, red as his heart's blood. He looked so wounded, so passive, as if content to succumb to a blow which he was too generous, too magnanimous to return in kind.

And he said never a word.

She felt that her face was flaring scarlet; the hot tears were smitten into her eyes. She could not speak, and, for a long moment neither of the two men moved, although the horse, restive and eager to be off, plunged now and again, almost lifting from his feet the groom at his head, still swinging at the bit, but staring, as if resolved into eyes, at the group on the piazza.

"It is the key to something of value"—she found her voice suddenly—"or it would never have been so charmingly decorated. I hope it will unlock all the doors shut against you," she concluded with a little bow.

"Thank you," he said formally. And he said no more.

"And now shall we go?" asked Floyd-Rosney curtly.

There being only four places, the gentlemen occupying the front seats, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, the nurse and the baby the others, there was no room for the groom, and Ducie, gathering up the reins preparatory to driving, directed him to return to the livery stable on one of the cotton wagons which would be starting in an hour or so. The ill-looking fellow touched his cap, loosed the bit and the horse sprang away with an action so fine, so well sustained, that Floyd-Rosney's brow cleared. The pleasure of the moment was something.

"What will you take for him?" he asked, quite human for the nonce.

"Not for sale. Couldn't spare him," Ducie responded, the reins wound about his forearms, all his strength requisite to hold the abounding vitality and eagerness of the animal to the trot, the hoofs fall-

ing with the precision of machinery, mile after mile.

Only once did the pace falter. Suddenly the animal plunged. A man dashed out from the Cherokee rose hedge that bordered the high-way and clutched the bit. With the momentum of his pace the horse swung him off his feet, and frightened and swerving from the road, reared high. As the forefeet crashed to the ground once more with a sharp impact the man was thrown sprawling to the roadside, and the horse was a mile away before the occupants of the vehicle knew exactly what had happened.

"Oh,—oh——!" cried Paula, "was the man hurt? What did he want?"

"No good," said her husband grimly.

"Oh, oughtn't we go back and see what we have done?" She could scarcely speak with the wind of their transit blowing the words down her throat. "Oh, I know Mr. Floyd-Rosney won't, but, Randal, don't you think we ought?"

"Hardly," said Randal.

Floyd-Rosney's head slowly turned, and his slumberous eyes, with a bated fury smoldering in their depths, looked their sneering triumph at his wife.

"That crack,—was it——?" he asked of Randal.

"A pistol ball, I think. I saw—I thought I saw a puff of smoke from the Cherokee hedge. My head feels hot yet. For simple curiosity look at my hat."

Floyd-Rosney removed the hat from the head of the man by him. He turned it in his hand and his eyes glittered. Then he held it out for Ducie's observation.

There was a small orifice on one side, and a cor-

responding rift, higher, on the other. Evidently, the ball had passed through.

"Thirty caliber, I should judge," Floyd-Rosney ventured.

"Looks so?" Randal assented.

"But why—*why*—" exclaimed Paula, "should Randal be shot at—he might have been killed—oh, any of us might have been killed!"

"The story of the treasure trove—out already, I suppose," suggested Floyd-Rosney.

"And it is believed that I have it now in my possession, carrying it to a place of safety," said Ducie.

"Just as well for you to get to town as speedily as possible," remarked Floyd-Rosney.

To have escaped an attempt at highway robbery is not an agreeable sensation, however futile and ill advised the enterprise. This possibility had not occurred to Floyd-Rosney, yet he perceived its logic. It was obvious that the rich find of gold and jewels must be removed from Duciehurst, and by whom more probably than their owner? Doubtless, the miscreants had expected Ducie to be accompanied only by the groom, perhaps a party to the conspiracy, and albeit this supposition had gone awry, there was only one unarmed man beside himself to contend against a possible second attack. Floyd-Rosney would be glad to be rid of Ducie on every account. No such awkward association had ever befallen him, significant at every turn. But, when actual physical danger to himself and his family was involved in sitting beside him, he felt all other objections frivolous indeed, and it was in the nature of a rescue when the fast horse drew up be-

side the platform of the little station near Glenrose, where the train was already standing.

The *congé* was of the briefest, although Randal omitted no observance which a courteous voluntary host might have affected. He left the horse in charge of an idler about the station, assisted Mrs. Floyd-Rosney into the coach, where, to her husband's satisfaction, the stateroom was vacant and they might thus be spared the presence of the vulgar horde of travelers. He shook hands with both husband and wife, only leaving the train as it glided off. Paula, looking from her window, had her last glimpse of him, standing on the platform, courteously lifting his hat in farewell. She had a wild, unreasoning protest against the parting, her eyes looked a mute appeal, and she felt as if delivered to her fate.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE ex-jockey, left standing alone on the drive in front of the old mansion, had watched, with glowing eyes, the departure of the phaëton from Diciehurst.

"Ai-yi, Ran Dicie," he jeered, "ridin' for a fall you are, if you did but know it!"

The vehicle was out of sight in a moment. He thrust his cap on the back of his head, sunk his hands deep in his pockets and strode up the flight of steps to the broad stone-floored portico. He stood for a moment, watching the great shining, rippling expanse of the silent river, vacant save for a small steamer of the government fleet, whisking along in haste on the opposite side, with a heavy coil of smoke and a fluttering flag. Then he strolled into the house, looking about keenly and furtively as he went. The place was obviously familiar to him, doubtless from many secret explorations, and, without hesitation, he took his way up two flights of stairs, threading the vacant apartments, coming, at last, to the third story which gave access to the interior of the capital of the pilaster where the treasure had been found.

He stood, his hands still in his pockets, gazing into the cavity, the washboard left where it had been prized away from the wall. He stooped down presently and sought to explore the interior of the pil-

lar, pulling out first the rotten fragments of the ancient knapsack. He gazed at these remnants with great scorn of their obsolete fashioning, then set to work to ransacking them, deftly manipulating the flaps lest something hidden there should escape his scrutiny. The search resulted in naught, save a handful of crumbs of desiccated leather. He even paused to examine the quality of the fabric and the stitching of the construction.

“Sewed by hand, by jinks!” he muttered. But the article had evidently been used merely as protection, or concealment, perhaps, for the box it had contained. He made a long-armed lunge into the depths of the cavity in hopes of further booty, realizing that he was the first intruder into the place after the departure of the refugees from the *Cherokee Rose*, and might make prize of whatever they had possibly overlooked. His heart quickened its beats as his fingers touched straw, but when he dragged forth a bundle holding persistently together he discovered that it was but one of the well-woven, enormous nests of the tiny sparrow, creeping in through a crevice without, and, like some human builders, having a disproportionate idea of suitable housing for its station. He spat a flood of tobacco juice upon the cunning work of the vanished architects, and, with a curse as grotesque as profane, made a circuit of the interior of the cavity in the pillar with his bare palms. Nothing—quite empty. The treasure had lain here for forty years, the fact bruited throughout the traditions of the country. Hundreds, of whom he was one, had made vain search—“and Randal Ducie had found it first go! Some people have *all* the luck!” He had ventured

to the window of the great dining-room last night, after his confederates had fled, and had gazed with gloating eyes on the pile of gold and jewels on the table before Adrian Ducie, whom he mistook for the man familiar to the neighborhood. The sight had maddened him. He had urgently sought to stimulate his confederates to an attack on the place while the money lay undefended, openly on the table. He thought that in the tumult of surprise a rich capture might be effected.

"To snatch jes' a handful would have done me a heap o' good," he meditated.

But no! Binnhart had declared they were too far outnumbered, that the enterprise was impracticable. And Binnhart had seemed slow and dazed, and himself the victim of surprise. Colty's loose lips curled with bitter scorn as he recalled how owlishly wise Binnhart had looked when he had declared that he would try first the inside and then the outside of this pilaster from the ground floor, instead of at once essaying the capital,—but he did not know what a "capital" was,—nor, indeed, did the jovial "Colty" until he heard the word from Randal Ducie a few minutes ago. In fact, Binnhart did not know the difference between a "pillar" and a "pilaster," except as the builder in Caxton had expounded the terms. Indeed, Binnhart, assuming to be a leader of men, should be better informed. Leader! He would lead them all to the penitentiary if they followed him much farther. It was an ill-omened association of ideas. Colty Conover began to wonder if any of the refugees from the *Cherokee Rose* had acquired any knowledge of the search for the treasure prosecuted from without.

He remembered how suddenly the sound of a woman's screams had frightened the marauders from their occupation in what they had deemed the deepest solitude. If some woman had been sitting at this window she could easily have heard their unsuspecting talk. He looked down speculatively. Through the broken roof of the portico he could discern some of their abandoned tools still beside the base of the column. "Pilaster," he sneered. The word had for him the tang of an opprobrious epithet. She could have heard everything. Had she, indeed, heard aught? Could she remember the names? She could doubtless recall "Colty." That was within the scope of the meanest intelligence. He began to quail with the realization of disastrous possibilities. What woman was it, he wondered. The one in the phaëton? He hoped Binnhart might shoot her in the hold-up planned on the road. A pistol ball would tie her tongue if—if she had not already told all she knew! Yet what would his name signify? Only that he was one of the seekers who from time immemorial had ransacked the house for its treasure. Robbery, perhaps, in a way, yet what was so definitely abandoned to the will of the marauder could scarcely be esteemed in the pale of ownership. If only the gang had not left their insane victim bound and gagged, as evidence of their brutality. "Colonel Kenwynton will never rest till he ferrets out who done that job." He winced and lifted one foot high, and let it down with a stamp. "I'd hate for the old Colonel to git on my track, sure," he muttered.

He reflected that this was what had queered the whole run, through Binnhart's self-sufficiency,

though that fellow, Treherne, did tell, in his sleep, where the money was hid. If they had known—if they had only known—what constituted the capital of a pillar. It had been mismanaged—mismanaged from the beginning, and once more he declared that it was Captain Hugh Treherne who had queered the whole run.

He walked slowly down the stairs into the broad hall, and then, threading the vacant apartments with the definite intention of familiarity, he came into the room where poor Hugh Treherne had lain for hours bound and gagged, not knowing whether his sufferings were actual or the distraught illusions of his mental malady.

Connover stood looking at the many footprints in the dust on the floor, clustered about the clear space where the man had lain. In the corners of the apartment the dust was thick and gray and evidently had not been disturbed in years. Here it was that the refugees of the *Cherokee Rose* had found Captain Treherne. But he could not have informed his rescuers where the swag was hidden. He himself did not know,—he could not say when he was awake. By reason of his distorted mental processes only in dreams did his memory rouse itself; only his somnolent words could reveal the story of the hiding of the treasure in the capital of the pilaster. As, in his ignorant fashion, Connover sought to realize the situation he groped for the clew of its discovery. How had they chanced to find it? Could the woman have overheard the talk of the gang from the window of the attic, and, knowing the signification of the terms “pilaster” and “capital,” could she have fallen like a hawk upon her prey? Oh, Binn-

hart was distanced by the whole field,—a fool and a fake. And if he should botch this hold-up that he had planned for Randal Ducie— Suddenly a nervous thrill agitated Connover. He was conscious that an eye was upon him, a fixed, furtive scrutiny. He gazed wildly about the desolate, empty room. Almost he could see a vague figure at the door withdrawing abruptly as he glanced toward it, but when he ran into the hall there was naught for sixty feet along which any spy upon him must have passed. Still, as he returned, reassured, he felt again that covert gaze. Nothing was visible at the window on one side of the apartment. On the other side the room was lighted by a glass door opening on a veranda, in which the panes had recently been shattered, and broken glass lay about. When he pulled it ajar loose bits fell from the frame and crashed upon the floor, setting astir keen shrill echoes through the empty desolation that put every quivering nerve to the torture. Outside he heard a vague, silly laugh even before he perceived Mrs. Berridge standing close against the wall in her effort to escape observation, her head, with its towslid copper hair, all bare, but an apron pinned shawl-wise around her shoulders in lieu of a wrap.

“I’m cotched,” she exclaimed deprecatingly. “I thought I’d peek in and find out what’s going on, though I reckon I ain’t wanted.”

“Not much you ain’t,” he declared, recovering his composure with difficulty. “How’d you come?”

“In the dug-out,” she explained. “I tied Possum in his bunk, and locked him up, and took out. He’s safe enough.”

"Oh, that's all right. He'll spend most of his days locked up, ennyhow," Colty roughly joked.

"He won't nuther." She struck at him with an affectation of retaliation. But her face was not jocose, and a tallowy pallor accented the freckles.

"Colty," she lowered her voice mysteriously, "I have heard shootin'."

"Naw!" he cried remonstrantly, as if the reluctance to entertain the fact could annul it.

"Whenst on the ruver I heard shootin'," she declared again.

"Oh, shucks, gal," he exclaimed. "You couldn't hear it so fur off."

"On the water!" she cried, lifting her eyebrows. "The water fetches the sound."

"He *said* he wouldn't shoot," cried Colty Conover, his lip pendulously drooping. "He said on no account."

"You b'lieve his gab? Well, you *are* a softy!" she flung at him. Then, with one end of the apron string in her mouth, she ejaculated murmurously: "I heard shootin'," looking doubtfully and vaguely over her shoulder.

"Then he'll swing for it ef he's killed Ran Ducie. There ain't a more pop'lar man in the county, nor a better judge of horseflesh."

"I ain't carin' fur Binnhart arter the way he made me trick that crazy loon out'n his secrets an' then declared he'd gimme nuthin' thout he found the truck."

"Pulled the horse an' lost yer pay, too," grinned Colty.

"But all the rest will be tarred with the same stick—'

"Not me nor you," interrupted Colty Connover, — "'cause he said he wouldn't shoot. He swore he wouldn't."

Suddenly she pushed back her tousled red hair as she stood near the glass door, and looked up with a startled apprehension on her face.

"Listen, Colty, listen——! What is that sound — what is that sound?"

Then a strange thing happened. The sun, low in its circuit, was already westerling on the October day. Even now its radiance fell through the great windows and open doors all aslant, and lay in deep orange tints athwart the bare, dusty floors. Many a skein-like effulgence was suspended from the panes, and on these fine and fiery lines illuminated motes were scattered like the notation of music on an immaterial cleff. There was no wind, no rustle of the magnolia trees glimpsed without. The river was silent as always. The stillness was intense, indescribable, and, suddenly, with a long drawn sigh, a creaking dissonance, the old house gave forth one loud moan, voicing its sorrows, its humiliation, its inanimate woe.

The two looked at each other with aghast, white faces. Then, with a common impulse, they fled from — they knew not what. The woman sprang out of the shattered glass door and sped through the shrubbery, across the ruined levee to her dug-out, swinging at the old landing. The groom dashed down the hall, the echoes of his steps hard on his heels like swift pursuers, out into the road, and thence, scarcely relaxing his pace, ran along the rugged ground till he was in the turn-row, where his speed was aided by the smooth hard-beaten earth. The

cotton was breast high, and glittering in the afternoon sun—a famous crop. He could scarcely see the pickers, although he noted here and there their big cylindrical baskets, filled as the bags, suspended from their necks, overflowed from time to time. A great wagon was drawing up at one side where the road struck the turn-row, and this notified him that the weigher, with his steelyards, had arrived to pay off the laborers according to the weight of the contents of their baskets, and to convey the product to Ran Ducie's gin. He welcomed the sight of another white man, for he desired more credible testimony, in case it should be needed, than the haphazard observation of the darkey cotton pickers that he was miles distant from the scene of Binnhart's hold-up at the time of the shooting. Hence he attached himself to the society of the weigher, and made himself unpleasantly conspicuous, and was officious and obstructive during the weighing process, as much from latent intention as maladroit folly. When, at last, the wagons were heaped and he and the weigher took their seats behind two of the big mules, the pickers, trailing on foot contentedly in the rear, his companion observed: "I'm goin' to tell Mr. Ducie that the nex' time he treats you to a ride he may pervide a coach and four, for durned if I'll have you monkeying in the cotton fields along of me another time." Colty Connover had made the desired impression and on this score he was content. Nevertheless, again and again during the afternoon, throughout the process of the weighing, and on the road to the town, and in the midst of his duties at the livery stable there recurred to him a stupefied, stunned realization of some uncomprehended

crisis, and again and again he asked himself helplessly: "What was that strange sound in the old house? What was it?"

And on the river bank, in the little amphibious cabin upon its grotesque high-water stilts, through all the afternoon and deep into the night, the woman with a vague thrill of terror futilely wondered, "What was that strange, strange sound in the old house? What was it?"

## CHAPTER XV

CERTAINLY no institution of its type ever had such cheerful inmates as the Glenrose Sanatorium could boast so long as Colonel Kenwynton and the blind Major sojourned within its gates, the guests of the alienist and Captain Hugh Treherne. The patient experienced no recurrence of his malady during the visit. Indeed, the beneficial influence, with the incident change of thought, conversation, and occupation, was so obvious that the physician acceded to Colonel Kenwynton's earnest urgency to allow the Captain to go home with him and spend a few weeks at his plantation, in a neighboring county. They made a solemn compact for the conservation of his safety and the promotion of his mental health.

"Captain," said the Colonel the first evening that they spent together over the wood fire in the old plantation house, "I don't know what is the particular devil that you say possesses you at times, and I don't want to know. He is an indignity to you and an affront to me. Never mention the nature of the obsession to me for I won't hear it. Never let me have so much as a glimpse of his horn or his hoof. But if you, unhappily, ever feel again the clutch of his claw fastening on you, just report to me, and we'll both strike out in a dog-trot for that insane asylum, and let the doctor exorcise him a bit. And I swear to you before God on our sacred bonds as comrades in the Lost Cause I will stay there with you till you

are ready to come home with me. Shake hands on it, dear old fellow—shake hands on it."

Perhaps because the topic was interdicted in conversation it was the less intrusive in thought. Hugh Treherne maintained an observance of the Colonel's mandate as strict and as soldierly as if it had been read in general orders at the head of the regiment. He found an interest in the Colonel's affairs in the ramshackle old place, which was but a meager remnant of his former princely domain. Colonel Kenwynton had brought down from the larger methods of the old times a constitutional disregard of *minutiæ*. Hence men, "indifferent honest," otherwise would overreach him in negotiation. Servants filched ruthlessly his minor possessions. His pastures, fields, barns, orchards, were plundered with scarcely a realization of the significance of robbery, the facile phrase, "The old Cunnel won't care," or "The old Cunnel won't ever know the difference," sufficient to numb any faint prick of conscience.

And thus it was that his home had fallen to decay; his barns and fences rotted; his gin was broken and patched and deteriorated in common with all his farm machinery; his hedges of Cherokee rose, widened, unpruned and untended, becoming veritable land grabbers, rather than boundaries, and yearly more and more of his acres must needs be rented for lack of funds to pay a force of laborers. Colonel Kenwynton lived on in his mortgaged home and "scuffled up the money," as he phrased the process, to meet the interest year by year, and kept but sorry cheer by a bleak and lonely fireside. Nevertheless, he twirled up the ends of his white mustachios jauntily and faced the world with a bold front.

From his own account it seemed wonderful that he had any income at all, and as if much business tact must be requisite to hold his mortgages together in such shape that they should assume all the enlightened functions of a fortune. The age of some of these obligations was a source of special pride with him, although sometimes with an air of important dismay he would compute the amount of interest he had paid in the course of years on their several renewals aggregating more than the property would sell for in the present collapsed condition of such real estate values. When he came to speak of the interest he had promised to pay, he would pause with an imperative shake of the head, as if to abash the futurity which was fast bringing about the maturity of these notes.

"Why, Colonel, this is not good business,—you have practically bought your own property twice over," Treherne attempted to argue with him one day when his mood waxed confidential. "You should have given up the fight long ago and let them foreclose."

"Foreclose on my home place, sir,—the remnant of my father's plantation?" he replied in amaze. "Why, what would the snail do without the shell he was born with? I shall need a narrower one before that day comes, I humbly trust in Providence."

Colonel Kenwynton could scarcely imagine existence without a mortgage. A deed of trust seemed as natural and essential an incident of a holding in fee simple as the title papers.

Treherne discovered as time went on opportunities for betterment in the Colonel's affairs, small it is true, pitiful in comparison with the ideals of

the old gentleman, who lifted his brows in compassionate surprise when the subject was broached, and, but that he could not contravene the common sense of the proposition, he might have thought it an insane impulse, manifesting itself in schemes of domestic economy on a minute scale.

"Colonel, this place ought to make its own meat. There is plenty of corn in that rearward barn. I put a padlock on its door to-day. Those young shoats will be as fine a lot of meat as ever stepped by hog-killing time. I had them turned into the oak woods to-day,—to give them a chance at the mast,—makes the meat streaked lean and fat, you know."

"You surprise me," said the Colonel, looking blankly over his spectacles. "I didn't know there was any corn left. And a few hogs didn't seem worth wasting time about. I don't go into such matters, dear boy,—cotton is my strong suit. Cotton is the only play."

"You spent your time in the war mostly on the firing line, Colonel. Somebody ought to be mighty thankful you were not in the quartermaster's office. That ham we cut to-day came from the store, and the cook tells me so does every pound of lard that goes into your frying pan, and all the bacon you furnish to your force of hands. And yet you have here an ample lot of bacon on the hoof and abundance of good feed to fatten it."

The Colonel appraised the logic and sat humiliated and silent.

"I had the shoats all marked and sent the mark to the county court to be registered. And now you'll

eat your own meat after January or go without," said Treherne sternly, in command of the situation.

By some accident, searching in the Colonel's desk for an envelope or some such matter, Treherne chanced to discover a receipt for a bill which the old gentleman had carelessly paid twice.

"I took his word, of course," said the Colonel in vicarious abasement, "as the word of a gentleman and an old soldier."

"An old soldier on the back track generally. I remember him well," said Treherne uncompromisingly. "He shall refund as sure as my name is Treherne."

And he did refund, protesting that the matter was an accident, an oversight, which excuses the Colonel accepted in good faith and brought back to the skeptical Hugh Treherne.

"So queer those mistakes never happen to your advantage, Colonel," he snarled, and although his contention was obviously logical, the Colonel listened dubiously.

In truth, Colonel Kenwynton was of a different animus, of a dead day, of a species as extinct as the Plesiosaurus. He could not even adapt himself to the conditions of his survival. He could neither hear nor speak through the telephone, although all his faculties were unimpaired. He held himself immune from diseases of modern diagnosis; for him there was no microbe, no appendicitis, no neurasthenia. His credulity revolted against the practicability of wireless telegraphy and aviation. He clove to his old books, and, except for the newspapers, he read nothing that had been printed within the last fifty years. His ideas of amusement were those

of previous generations. He was a skilled sportsman, a dead shot, indeed; his play at billiards held the record at his club; he was versed in many games of chance and had the nerve to back his hand or his opinion to the limit of his power.

He was a shrewd judge of horseflesh, and, as he often remarked since he could no longer own and race a string, he took pleasure in seeing the fine animals of other men achieve credit on the turf. Despite his early gambling and racing proclivities he had always been esteemed a man of immaculate honor and held a high social position. This ascendancy was supplemented by certain associations of special piety incongruously enough. As long as his wife had lived he accompanied her to church every Sunday morning; he drew the line, it is true, at the evening service. He carried a large prayerbook, and his notable personality rendered his presence marked. He read the responses with a devotional air and a solemn voice and listened to the sermon with an appearance of unflagging interest and absorption; as he seemed to take it for granted that he could go to heaven on the footing of an honorary member, his persuasion was in a manner accepted, and it might have been a source of surprise to his friends to realize that, after all, he was not a professedly religious man.

For some weeks the two incongruous companions lived on in great peace and amity in the seclusion of the old plantation house, a rambling frame structure far too large for the shrunken number of its inmates. The broad verandas surrounding it on three sides scarcely knew a footfall; the upper story was unoccupied save for the Colonel's bedroom, for

Treherne had selected a chamber among the vacant apartments on the ground floor that, through a glass door opening on the veranda, permitted his egress betimes to take up his self-arrogated supervisory duties on the place hours before his host, always a late riser, was astir.

One night,—a memorable night,—a dreadful thing happened. The Colonel lay asleep in his big mahogany four-poster; the placidity of venerable age on his face was scarcely less appealing than the innocence of childhood; his snowy hair on the pillow gave back a silvery gleam to the red suffusions from the hearth. If he dreamed, it was of some gentle phase of yore, for his breathing was soft and regular, his consciousness far away adown the misty realms of the past, irrevocable save in these soft and sleeping illusions. The old house was still and silent. At long intervals an errant gust stole around a corner and tried a window. Then it skulked away and, for a time, a mute peace reigned.

Suddenly a sound,—not of the elements, not from without. A sound that in the deep peace of dreams smote no fiber of consciousness. It came again and again. It was the sound of a step ascending the stair. A slender shaft of light preceded it—the dim radiance showed first in a line under the door. Then the door slowly swung ajar, and Hugh Treherne entered, his candle in his hand—not the officer that the old Colonel had known and trusted in the years that tried men's souls, who never broke faith or failed in a duty; not the piteous wreck whom he had met on the tow-head where the *Cherokee Rose* lay aground, who wept on his neck and besought his aid; not the earnest altruist, who planned

and contrived his escape from durance, through suffering and dread, to retrieve the injustice done to an old comrade's heirs, and with his first recall of memory to reveal hidden treasure to enrich other men. This was Hugh Treherne, of the obsession, a man who believed himself possessed of the devil.

Colonel Kenwynton, gazing wincingly up with eyes heavy with sleep, and dazed by the glare of the candle held close to his face, hardly recognized the lineaments bent above him—wild, distorted, with a sinister smile, a queer furtive doubt, as if some wicked maniacal impulse debated with the vanishing instinct of reason in his brain.

The Colonel feared no man. The instinct of fear, if ever it had existed in him, was annulled, atrophied. But in this lonely house, in the presence of this strange and inexplicable possession, in all that this change, so curiously wrought, so radical, so sinister, intimated, his blood ran cold.

"He has come, Colonel," hissed the strange man, for the Colonel could hardly make shift to recognize him, "the Devil has come!"

There was an aghast pause. Then Colonel Kenwynton understood the significance of the catastrophe. He plunged up in the bed, throwing off the cover, and gazed wildly around the room.

"The Devil has come?—Then skirmish to the front, Hugh! Hold him in check, while I get on my clothes, and I'll flank him. By George, I've led a forlorn hope in my time, and I'm not to be intimidated by any little medical fiend like this!"

It was not long, however, that they sojourned at the sanatorium, but the doctor, who had heard of the suddenness of the seizure, warned Colonel Ken-

wynton that he had always best have help at hand in case of a relapse as sudden.

"You might be in danger of violence from him," the doctor explained, seeing that Colonel Kenwynton stared in blank amaze.

"In danger of violence, sir, *from my own officer*," he exclaimed, flouting the obvious absurdity, as if the Confederate army were in complete organization, the loyal submission to a superior in rank at once the dearest behest and the instinct of second nature with the soldier.

And, indeed, Hugh Treherne justified the trust. He wrought Colonel Kenwynton nothing but good. His mental health was so far restored to its normal strength that when they had returned together to the old home he took the lead in all those practical little affairs of life which bored the Colonel, and which he at once misunderstood and despised. He shrank from society, in which, indeed, he was more feared than welcomed, and the Colonel, in compassion for his infirmity and loneliness, had given up most of his cronies. The Colonel suffered from this deprivation more than Treherne, who took an intense and almost pathetic interest in trifling improvements; the fences were mended; the farm buildings were repaired; various small peculations ceased, for the servants and the hands whose interests brought them about the place were afraid of the "crazy man," and were alert and capable in obeying his orders,—the anger that flashed in his wild dark eyes was not reassuring. He pottered in placid content about these industrial pursuits till chance led to a greater utility.

He displayed unexpected judgment in advice

which saved the Colonel from taking a financial step that would, indeed, have bereft the simple snail of his rickety old shell in his defenseless years, and certain financiers of a dubious sort, baffled in the expectation of gain at the old man's loss, looked askance at Hugh Treherne and his influence with his former commander which promised in time to remove him altogether from their clutches. They made great talk of having considered his interest rather than their own, and in set phrase withdrew the sun of their favor to shine on his shattered affairs no more. But his affairs were on the mend. Through Treherne's urgency he devoted the returns from the bulk of his cotton crop, unusually large this year, to the lifting of a mortgage on a pretty tract of land nearer the county town than his plantation, almost in the suburbs, in truth, and which was thus left unencumbered. In this matter he was difficult of persuasion, and yielded only at last to be rid of importunacy.

"Lord, Hugh, how lonesome I do feel without that money," he said drearily, lighting his candle one night.

"But you have got the land free of all encumbrance, Colonel,—dead to rights,—within two miles of the town, right out there in the night."

"It is a cold night and dark," said the Colonel, toying with the snuffers. "It seems cruel to leave it there, bare and bleak, with no sort of a little old mortgage to cover it."

But then he laughed and took himself upstairs to his rest.

A similar application of funds betided his later shipments of bales, the receipts from which were

formerly wont to vanish in driblets he hardly knew how.

"Hugh, this way of paying debts that I thought would last through my time and be discharged by my executors almost takes my breath away," he said half jocosely, half upbraiding. "You scarcely leave me a dollar for myself,—to buy me a little 'baccy.' " And then they both laughed.

In the forty years of Hugh Treherne's incarceration such independent means as he had possessed had barely sufficed for his maintenance at the sanatorium, constantly dwindling until now becoming inadequate for that purpose. His relatives greatly disapproved of the course that events had taken and were also solicitous for his safety while at large and the possibility of injury to others at his hands. One of them, a man of ample fortune, by way of coercing acquiescence in their views, notified Colonel Kenwynton that they would not be responsible for any expenses which Captain Treherne might incur during his absence from the asylum, where he had been placed with the sanction of his kindred, and where the writer of this communication was prepared to defray all the costs of his sojourn and treatment. Colonel Kenwynton, in a letter as formal and courteous as a cartel and as smoothly fierce, expressed his ignorance that any moneys had been asked of Captain Treherne's relatives, and begged to know when and by whom such requests had been made. Then a significant silence settled on the subject.

The old Colonel felt that he had routed the enemy, but Hugh Treherne, to whom he detailed the circumstances, for he treated his friend in every re-

spect as a sane man and kept nothing from him, did not share his host's elation. A deep gloom descended upon his spirits and a furtive apprehension looked out of his eyes. He cautiously scanned the personnel of every approach to the house before he ventured to appear and greet the newcomers, and in his small interests about the place he kept within close reach of refuge. The negroes began to notice that he discontinued his supervisory errands to the fields where the picking of cotton was still in progress and where he had shown himself exceedingly suspicious of the accounts of the weigher and the bulk of the cotton delivered as compared with the distribution of the money furnished by Colonel Kenwynton for paying the cotton pickers. "The ole Cunnel's crap will sho'ly turn out fur all hit is worf' dis time," the grinning darkeys were in the habit of commenting.

The old gentleman was constitutionally and by training incapable of detecting this deviation from the established routine, but affection whetted his wits and he observed the change in Hugh Treherne's appearance when it began to be so marked as scarcely to be imputed to fluctuations in his malady.

"Why are you looking so down-in-the-mouth, Hugh?" he demanded one morning after breakfast as he sprawled comfortably with his pipe before the crackling fire, agreeable in the chill of the early December day despite the bland golden sunshine of the southern winter. Treherne cast at him a glance helplessly terrified, like a child in the face of danger, and said not a word. "You are losing your relish for country life, I am afraid," the Colonel went on. "Why, you haven't put your foot in stirrup for a

week. Why don't you take your horse out for a canter?"

The hearty genial tones opened the floodgates of confidence. It was impossible for Treherne to resist the look of affectionate solicitude, of kindly sympathy in those transparently candid eyes.

"Colonel,—I'm—I'm—afraid."

"Zounds, sir. Afraid of what?"

"Capture," the hunted creature replied succinctly.

"Why, look here, man," the Colonel rallied him, "I really think you have been captured before this time. How long were you in prison at Camp Chase?"

"But, Colonel, this is different. I think my friends—my unfriends,—are bent on restoring me to seclusion."

"Doctor Vailer won't receive you,—professional pride much lacerated by the criticism of his course expressed by your precious relative, Tom Treherne,—excuse me if I pause here to particularly curse him—and you know when you touch a really learned technician of any sort on his professional pride, you have got hold of his keenest susceptibility, where he feels most acutely and most high-mindedly, the very nerves of his soul, so to speak, his spiritual essence. Doctor Vailer won't have you."

"But there are other alienists, other asylums in Mississippi."

"And under your favor there is *me* in Mississippi,—and there is the law of the land. I tell you, Hugh, that Tom Treherne might as well try to bottle up the Mississippi River as to incarcerate you again without Doctor Vailer's sanction, of course, so long as I am out of the ground."

Hugh Treherne stirred uneasily and crossed and uncrossed his legs as he sat opposite the Colonel in a big mahogany chair before the frowsy hearth where the ashes of nearly all the fires since fall set in were banked behind the big tarnished brass dogs—the Colonel was no dainty housekeeper, and deserved the frequent declaration that “de Cunnel don’t know de diffunce.”

“People generally, Colonel, will approve the course of my relations,” Treherne argued. “It will seem the proper thing as long as I am—am—occasionally—absent.”

“Well, you are all here, now, in one piece,” declared the old man, wagging his head with vehement emphasis.

“It will seem very generous of Tom Treherne to offer, to desire to maintain me at his own expense at a high-priced private sanatorium, since I have no means of my own.”

He paused, a bitter look of repulsion on his face. All these years—these long years, the men of his own age, the compeers of his youth, had been at work restoring their shattered fortunes, after the terrible cataclysm of war that had wrecked the financial interests as well as the face of the southern country, achieving eminence and distinction in their varied lines of effort, life signifying somewhat of attainment even to those of meanest ability, while he was gone to waste, destroyed by his own gallant exploit; the blow of the sabre, the jeering accolade of Fate, when he had triumphantly led his troop to the capture of a strong battery, had consigned him to forty years of idleness, helplessness, imprison-

ment, in effect. "Be brave, loyal, and fortunate," quotha.

He was silently revolving these reflections so long that Colonel Kenwynton, puffing his pipe with gusto, declared:

"I'll make Tom Treherne's liberality look like thirty cents before I am done with him. He can't choke you off and hide you out because he is afraid you might be troublesome to *him* in the future,—dispose of you for good and all,—not while I am alive. Why, damme, man, you commanded a troop in my regiment."

"If he should once more lay hands on me I could never get away from him and his precautions and anxieties, and considerations for the safety of the public and open-handed generosity. And, Colonel, you might not know where he had stowed me away next time."

"Hoh," snorted the Colonel, "I never lose sight of you longer than between breakfast and dinner. I'd be on his track with every detective in the State before dark. Why, Hugh, I'm a moneyed man. I'd take advantage of your absence to mortgage that little tract of land out yonder bare of all encumbrance, and I'd spend the last nickel of it making publicity for Tom Treherne. *He* isn't going to spend any money except for his own objects. Now, boots and saddles! Time for you to be on the march!"

In two hours Treherne was back again, with a flush on his face and a light in his eyes, bearing the mail, for which he had ridden to the nearest town, and this contained matters of interest both for him and the Colonel. It was, indeed, a rare occurrence when he received a letter—in forty years he could

count the missives on the fingers of one hand. To-day the post brought him one addressed directly to him by Adrian Ducie, although the counsel for the two brothers wrote instead to Colonel Kenwynton. In common with all people of advancing years, Treherne was continually impressed with the superiority of the methods of the past in comparison with those of to-day. He noted the courtesy, the consideration of the tone of the letter, and at once likened it to the manner of the writer's boy uncle, who had been his chum and comrade in the ancient days. His heart warmed to the perception of tact which had induced this one of the brothers to write who had been present at the finding of the box and the valuable papers, that it was hoped would return to the Ducie heirs the estate which had been so long wrested from them. Adrian and Randal had both taken care on that occasion to express their deep appreciation of the efforts of Archie Ducie's friend to restore to them their rights, although they had been the victims of his disqualified memory. But now Adrian repeated their realization of the extreme and friendly interest which had caused this object to so persistently cling to the mind and intention of Captain Treherne, and asked if he would object to giving testimony in a sort which the counsel recommended, immediately after the filing of the bill for the recovery of the property, a proceeding *de bene esse*, to be used in case of death or a recurrence of a malady which would prevent the taking of his deposition in the regular proceedings in the cause.

It was a difficult letter to write, a delicate proposition to make, and it was done with a simple directness, a lack of circumlocution which might imply

that Adrian Ducie thought it a usual matter that gentlemen could be seized with a recurrence of acute mania, obstructing the course of business, and tending to impede justice. Treherne declared that it was exactly the sort of letter that Archibald Ducie would have written, and he was eager to comply with the request.

“Only,” he began, and paused abruptly.

“Only what?” asked the Colonel, looking up with grizzled eyebrows drawn.

“You don’t know how—how baffling it is to talk, to speak, when you are aware that everybody is all the time disparaging every word as insanity. Even you could scarcely hold your own under such circumstances.”

“I could,” declared the Colonel hardily. “I’d know that nine out of every ten men are crazy anyhow, with no lucid intervals,—natural fools, born fools—fools for the lack of sense,—only,” with a crafty leer, “the rest of the fellows are so looney themselves that nobody has found it out.”

Treherne laughed, and the Colonel went on with his prelection.

“Never stop to consider what people will think, Hugh. They will think what they damn please. It is the root of most of the troubles that beset this world,—trying to square our preferences and duty to what people will think.”

Thus the testimony *de bene esse* was taken, Captain Treherne’s story from the beginning;—his part in the concealment of the treasure at Duciehurst, assisting his friend and comrade Archibald Ducie; his knowledge of the nature of the papers among the jewels; the early death of his friend; his own wound

and his consequent mental disability; his incarceration for forty years in an insane asylum; his recent recovery of memory, and his resolve to right this wrong which impelled him to make his escape from Glenrose; his meeting with Colonel Kenwynton; the strange attack he sustained from unknown miscreants after quitting the sand-bar; the transit, bound and gagged, to Duciehurst, supplemented by the circumstances of his liberation by Colonel Kenwynton and Adrian Ducie. The affidavit of the alienist as to his lucid condition at the time and his present mental reliability completed the proceedings.

This was merely a precautionary measure, designed to guard against a relapse of Captain Treherne into his malady. The Ducie heirs had already made formal demand for the restoration of their ancestral estate, alleging the full satisfaction of the indebtedness, recording the release of the mortgage and the quit-claim deed, and bringing suit against all in interest.

## CHAPTER XVI

FLOYD-ROSNEY could scarcely restrain his fury when the papers were served upon him. The whole subject had grown doubly distasteful because of its singular connection with his domestic concerns. He could not fall to so poor spirited a plane as to imagine that his wife preferred another man—he was too ascendant in his own estimation to harbor the thought. Logic, simple, plain common sense, forbade the conclusion. She had thrown this man over for him years ago at the first summons. He did not esteem his wealth as the lure; it was only an incident of his other superlative advantages. She had not seen the discarded lover since, yet from the moment of the appearance of the facsimile brother was inaugurated a change in her manner, her conversation, the very look in her eyes, which he could not explain, except as the result of old associations which he did not share, antagonistic to his interest and his domestic peace.

She had very blandly explained on the first opportunity, volunteering the communication, indeed, the mystery of the return of the key—an old *gage d'amour*, a trifle—the slightness of which he mentally conceded, for he had large ideas in *bijouterie*. She did not wish to keep it, nor to send it back without explanation; in fact, she was not willing to return it at all except in her husband's presence.

“Dear me, you need not have been so particular,”

he declared cavalierly. "A matter of no importance."

She had magnified it in her fear of him till it loomed great and menacing. She felt cheapened and crestfallen by his manner of receiving the disclosure. Yet he had marked the occurrence, she was sure; he had resented it—though he now flouted it as a trifle. This added to her respect for him, and it riveted the fetters in which he held her.

The inauguration of the suit to rip up and annul the ancient foreclosure, the many irritating questions as to whether the lapse of time could be pleaded in bar of the remedy, whether disabilities could be brought forward to affect the operation of the statute of limitations, what line of attack would be pursued by the Ducie brothers, all wrought him almost to a frenzy. He could scarcely endure even canvassing with his lawyers the points of his adversary's position. Any intimation of the development of possible strength on their part affected him like the discovery of disloyalty in his counsel. More than once the senior of these gentlemen saw fit to explain that this effort to probe the possibilities, to foresee and provide against the maneuvers of the enemy, to weigh the values in their favor, was not the result of conviction, but merely to ascertain the facts in the case.

The counsel, in closer conference still, closeted together, canvassed in surprise and disaffection the difficulty of handling their client, and the best method of avoiding rousing from his lair the slumbering lion of his temper. It was a case involving so much opportunity of distinction, of professional display, as well as heavy fees, that they were loath

to risk public discomfiture because Mr. Floyd-Rosney was prone to gnash his teeth at a mere inquiry which bore upon one of the many sensitive points with which the case seemed to bristle. He was as prickly as a porcupine, and to stroke him gently required the deftness of a conjurer. At the most unexpected junctures this proclivity of sudden rage, of unaccountable discomfiture broke forth, amazing and harassing the counsel, who, with all their perspicacity, could not perceive, lurking in the background of Floyd-Rosney's consciousness, the mirage of his wife's ancient romance, more especially as he himself could not justify its formulation on the horizon.

As Floyd-Rosney was accustomed to handle large business interests and was ordinarily open to any proposition of a practical nature, conservative in his views, and close and accurate in his calculation of chances, his attitude in this matter mystified his co-adjudicators, who had had experience hitherto in his affairs and were versed in his peculiar characteristics. The legal firm had come to avoid speaking of any point that might redound to the advantage of the opponent, unless, indeed, there was some bit of information necessary to secure from Floyd-Rosney. Thus matters had been going more smoothly, save that he was wont to come to the conferences with his counsel bearing always a lowering brow and a smoldering fire in his surly, brown eyes. It flared into open flame when one day Mr. Stacey, the senior counsel, observed:

“They will, doubtless, call Mrs. Floyd-Rosney.”

The client went pale for a moment, then his face turned a deep purplish red. Twice he sought to speak before he could enunciate a word.

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney," he sputtered at length. "As their witness? It is monstrous! I will not suffer it! It is monstrous!"

"Oh, no; not at all."

Mr. Stacey had a colorless, clear-cut face of the thin, hatchet-like type. His straight hair, originally of some blonde hue, had worn sparse, and neither showed the tint of youth nor demanded the respect due to the bleach of age. It seemed wasted out. He was immaculately groomed and was very spare; he looked, somehow, as if in due process of law he had been ground very sharp, and had lost all extraneous particles. There seemed nothing of Mr. Stacey but a legal machine, very cleverly invented, and, as he sat in his swivel chair, his thin legs crossed, he turned a bit from his desk, intently regarding Mr. Floyd-Rosney, who was thrown back in a cushioned arm-chair beside him, flanked by the great waste-paper basket, containing the off-scourings of the lawyer's desk. Mr. Stacey's light gray eyes narrowed as he gazed,—he was beginning to see into the dark purlieus of his client's reasonless conduct.

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney is perfectly competent to testify in the case." Mr. Stacey wore a specially glittering set of false teeth which made no pretense to nature, but gave effect to his clear-clipped enunciation. "Her deposition will certainly be taken by them."

"As against her husband?" foamed Floyd-Rosney in vehement argument. "She can be introduced *by* her husband to testify in his behalf, but not *against* him, except in her own interest, as you know right well."

"That incompetency is limited to the Mississippi

law as regards third persons, in the case of husband and wife. But in the proceedings in reference to the Tennessee property the local statutes will obtain,—she can testify against her husband's interest and, in my opinion, will be constrained to do this." After this succinct, dispassionate statement Mr. Stacey paused for a moment; then, in response to Floyd-Rosney's stultified bovine stare, as in speechless amazement, he went on with a tang of impatience in his tone. "Why, you know, of course, there is a bit of Tennessee property involved,—that small business house in South Memphis,—I forget, for the moment, the name of the street. You are aware that in the foreclosure proceedings nearly forty years ago the plantation and mansion house of Duciehurst were bid in for the estate of the mortgagee, but as the amount of the highest bid at the sale did not equal the indebtedness in the shrunken condition of real estate values at that time, the executors pursued and subjected other property of the mortgagor for the balance due, this Tennessee holding being a part of it, and the Duccies now contend that the debt having been previously fully satisfied and paid in full, this whole proceeding was null and void from the beginning. They bring suit for all in sight. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney can testify in their interest under the Tennessee statutes."

Floyd-Rosney sprang up and strode across the room, coming flush against the waste-paper basket as he threw himself once more into his chair, overturning the papers and scattering them about the floor. He took no notice of them, but the tidy Stacey glanced down at the litter, though with an inscrutable eye.

"Oh, I'll get her out of the country. They shall not have her testimony. They shall not call her as their witness. She has been wanting a trip to the Orient—she shall go—at once—at once!"

Mr. Stacey very closely and critically examined a paper knife that had been lying on the table. Then, putting it down, he rejoined, without looking at Floyd-Rosney, who was scarcely in case to be seen, the veins of his forehead swollen and stiff, his face apoplectically red, his eyes hot and angry: "They can have her deposition taken in a foreign country."

"If they can find her," said Floyd-Rosney in prophetic triumph. "But they would not take the time for that."

"Why, you don't reflect," said the lawyer very coolly, "the cause may not come to trial for two or three years. In view of the usual delays, continuances and the like, you could not expatriate her for that length of time."

Floyd-Rosney's face was a mask of stubborn conviction as he replied:

"The Duccies will want to race the matter through. They claim that they and their predecessors have been wrongfully kept out of their own for forty years. They will think that is long enough. *I* won't make delays. The question is a legal one, and can be decided on the jump—yes or no. The case can come to trial at the April term of the court, and by that time Mrs. Floyd-Rosney will be in Jerusalem or Jericho."

"This will damage your position in the case, Mr. Floyd-Rosney," urged the lawyer. "I think, myself, that it is a particularly valuable point for you that it should be your wife, who, at considerable risk and

in a very dramatic manner, discovered and secured these family jewels and papers, knowing what they were and that they threatened the title of her husband, and restored them to the complainants. It proves your good faith in your title—the foreclosure of the mortgage in ignorance of the outstanding release. Your wife as their witness is a valuable witness for us, and the motives of your contention being thus justified there remains nothing but the question of title to come before the court."

"All that rigamarole can be proved by other witnesses," said Floyd-Rosney doggedly. "There were twenty people who saw her come bouncing down the stairs with the box and give it to Adrian Ducie."

There is a species of anger expressed in unbecoming phraseology. Mr. Stacey made no sign, but the words "rigamarole," applied to his own lucid prelection, and "bouncing" to the gait of the very elegant Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, did not pass unnoted.

"I am sure the case on neither side can be ready for the April term,—the docket is crowded and there is always the possibility of continuances."

"There are to be no continuances on our side," declared Floyd-Rosney, both glum and stubborn; "I don't choose that my wife shall testify in their interest. She goes to the Orient, and stays there till the testimony is all in and the case closed."

## CHAPTER XVII

THE season had opened in a whirl of social absorption for Paula, once more established in their city house for the winter. She had never known her husband so interested in these functions nor so solicitous that her entertainments should be characterized by a species of magnificence that would once have dazzled and delighted her, but that now seemed only to illustrate his wealth and predominance. He was critical and fretful because of small, very small, deficiencies, as—some flower being unattainable that one less costly should be used in decoration, or a shade of an electrolier being broken that another, dissimilar to the rest in design, should be temporarily substituted. Her own toilets were submitted to his scrutiny and preference, and when she revolted, saying that she knew far more of such matters than he did, he lapsed into surly dissatisfaction. Once he spoke of a costume of delicate, chaste elegance as “common”—“nothing on it.” Then he added significantly, “You ought to have married a poor man, Paula, if that is your taste.”

She held the gown up when she was disrobing afterward and examined its points. She saw that the effect could have been duplicated in simple materials costing a trifle; thus beautifully and gracefully could she have gowned herself if she *had* married a poor man as once she had thought to do.

Of her own initiative she could not have given the

series of dinners of which the lavish richness astonished, as was intended, the guests, and of which, strangely enough, she was tired before they began. More than once, as she took up her position beside her husband in the glittering drawing-room, hearing the approach of the first of the guests, he said to her in a low voice, the tone like a pinch: "Don't seem so dull, Paula—you have gone off awfully in your looks lately, and that gown is no good. For Heaven's sake be more animated, and not so much like a rag doll." It was poor preparation to meet the coterie of men and women keyed to a high pitch of effort toward charm and brilliancy, as doing honor to the occasion, their hosts, and themselves. A large ball was also among the functions he planned, to be given in compliment to Hildegarde Dean, whose beauty he affected to admire extravagantly. He had remembered his wife's obvious jealousy of her attractions when Randal Ducie had seemed interested and delighted, and it did not soothe his unquiet spirit to note that now she had no grudging, but joined ardently in making the festivity a great success and an elaborate tribute to the reigning belle and beauty. She was required to invite the wives of certain men whom he desired to compliment,—yet who were not of his list of dinner guests,—to luncheons, and teas, and afternoon receptions, till she was tired out with the meaningless routine and sick at heart. Yet this was what she had craved—all her dream come true, pressed down and running over. Why had it no longer an interest for her? Was it sheer satiety, or was it that naught is of value when love has flown. And it had gone—even such poor semblance as had worn its name had vanished. She could not delude

herself, though she might make shift to masquerade in such wise that he should not know. She hoped for this, for she had begun to fear him. He was so arrogant, so self-sufficient, so dominant, so coercive. She feared his frown, his surly slumbrous eyes, his hasty outbursts of gusty temper.

One evening in this arid existence, this feast of dead-sea fruit, there was on hand no social duty—the pretty phrase for the empty frivolity—and she was glad of it. It was a gala night at the opera, for a star of distinction was to sing in a Wagnerian rôle, and the Floyd-Rosneys would occupy their box, according to their habit when aught worth while was billed. She was dressed for the occasion and awaiting him in the library, but he had not yet come in. She was more placid than her wont of late, for she realized that it would rest her nerves to be still and listen, a respite, however brief, from the tiresome round; and she had just come from the nursery where the baby was being put to bed—very playful, and freakish, and comical. She had been laughing with him, and at him, and the glow of this simple happiness was still warm in her heart when the door opened and her husband entered. He was not yet dressed for the evening, and, as she looked her surprise, he responded directly:

“No,—we are not going.”

He often changed his plans thus, regardless of her preferences, and she had grown so plastic to his will that she was able to readjust her evening or her day without regard to her previous expectations.

The spacious room might have seemed the ideal expression of a home of culture and affluence. The walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling, un-

broken save where a painting of value and distinction was inserted, special favorites of their owner, and placed here where his eyes might constantly rest upon them, rather than consigned to the gallery of his art treasures. The furniture was all of a fashion illustrating the extremity of luxury,—such soft cushions, such elastic springs, such deep pile into which the feet sunk treading the Oriental rugs. Not a sound from the street nor from any portion of the house could penetrate this choice seclusion, and over the fireplace, where the hickory logs flared genially, the legend "Fair Quiet, have I found thee here?" was especially accented by a finely sculptured statue of Silence, her finger on her lip, which stood on its pedestal at a little distance from the deep bay of a window.

The beautiful woman, in the blended radiance of the electric light and the home-like blaze, seemed as one of the favored of the earth. She had dressed with great care, and her gown of lavender gauze over satin of the same shade, with a string of fine pearls about her throat and another in her fair hair, could scarcely have incurred his unfavorable criticism. Her gloves of the same tint lay ready on the table and an evening cloak of white brocaded satin hung over a chair. Great pains and some time such a toilette cost; but she had learned never to count trouble if peace might ensue.

She was prepared to be left in ignorance of his reason for a change of plans, but he seemed, this evening, disposed to explain. He came and stood opposite to her, one hand lifted on the shelf of the massive mantelpiece, while he held his hat with the other. He was still in his overcoat, its collar and

lining of fur bringing out in strong relief the admirable points of his handsome face, its red and white tints, the brilliancy of his full lordly eyes, the fine shade of his chestnut hair. He was notably splendid this evening, vitally alert, powerful of aspect, yet graceful, all the traits of his manly beauty finished with such minutely delicate detail. She noticed the embellishment of his aspect, as if the evident quickening of his interest in some matter had enhanced it, and she remembered a day—long ago, it seemed, foolish and transient—when she had had a proud possessory sentiment toward this fair outer semblance of the identity within, so little known to her then, so overwhelming all other attributes of his personality.

She did not ask a question—she was too well trained by experience. He would tell her if he would; if not, it was futile to speculate as to his intentions.

“Well, the Oriental tour is *un fait accompli*,” he said, smiling. “You sail within the week.”

She started in surprise. She had definitely been denied this desire, which she had once harbored, on the score of all others most seemingly untenable—expense. But it was her husband’s habit to make everything inordinately costly. He would not appear in public except *en prince*, nor travel abroad save with a most elaborate and extensive itinerary and a suite of attendants.

“This week—why—I don’t know——” she hesitated. “I suppose—I can get ready.”

“Oh, you will scarcely need any preparation,” he said cavalierly. “Any old things will answer.”

This was so out of character with his wonted so-

licity in small matters that she was surprised and vaguely agitated. She saw a quiver in the tip of her dainty lavender slipper, extended on a hassock before her in the relaxed attitude she had occupied, and she withdrew it that the disquietude of her nerves might not be noticed. She raised herself to an upright posture in her chair before she replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I wasn't alluding to dress. What I am wearing here will answer, of course—but I was thinking of the arrangements for the nurse. Will we take his old colored nurse, or do you suppose she would not be equal to the requirements of the trip? Had Elise better go in her place?"

"Oh, that cuts no ice. For the baby won't go at all," he replied, as simply as if this were an obvious conclusion.

She sat petrified for one moment. Then she found her voice—loud and strong and definite.

"The baby won't go!" she exclaimed. "Then I won't go—not one foot! What do you take me for?"

"For a sensible woman," he retorted.

He looked angry, as always, when opposed, but not surprised. He had evidently anticipated her objection, and he controlled himself with care unusual to his ungoverned temper. "Who wants to go dragging a child three years old all around Europe and the Holy Land! You won't be gone more than a year!"

"A year! Why, Edward—are you crazy? To think I would leave the baby for a year! No—nor a month! No—nor a day! He has scarcely been

out of my sight for two hours together since he was born."

"How many women leave their children to take a trip abroad," he argued, and she began to feel vaguely that he would much prefer that she should agree peaceably—he was even willing to exert such self-control as was necessary to persuade her.

"Never—never would I," she declared, "and he would be miserable without me."

"Not with me here," her husband urged. "He is pleased to regard me with considerable favor." And he bent upon her his rare, intimate, confidential smile.

For, unknown to him, she had been at great pains to build up a sort of idolatry of his father in the breast of the little boy, such as children usually feel without prompting. He was taught to disregard Floyd-Rosney's averse, selfish inattention, to rejoice and bask in the sun of his favor, to run to greet him with pretty little graces, to admire him extravagantly as the finest man in all the world, to regulate his infantile conduct by the paternal prepossessions, being stealthily rewarded by his mother whenever his wiles attained the meed of praise.

Paula looked dazed, bewildered.

"You know, dearest, I am held here by the pressure of that villainous lawsuit, and as it will absorb all my leisure I thought that now is your chance for your Oriental tour—for I really don't care to go again, and you may never have another opportunity."

He paused, somewhat at a loss. She was leaning forward, gazing at him searchingly.

"What *can* possess you to imagine for one mo-

ment that I would go without the boy! What is the Orient to me—or my silly fad for Eastern travell I wish my tongue had been withered before I ever spoke the word!"

"Why, you talk as if I were proposing something amazing—abnormally brutal. Don't other women leave their children?"

"But with their mothers, or some one who stands in that tender, solicitous relation,—and I have no mother!" Her words ended in a wail.

"But he will be with me—and surely I care for him as much as you do," he argued, vehemently.

"But why can't I take him with me," she sought to adjust the difficulty, "even though the pleasure of the trip is lost if you don't go?"

"Because—because," he hesitated. "Because I cannot bear the separation from him," he declared bluntly. "I am afraid something—I don't know what—might happen to him. I know I am a fool. I couldn't bear it."

His folly went to her heart in his behalf as nothing else could have done. This evidence of his love for the child, his son and hers, atoned for a thousand slights and tyrannies which she forgave on the spot. Her brow cleared, her face relaxed, her cheek flushed.

"Aha!" she cried jubilantly, "you know how it feels, too!" She gleefully shook her fan at him. "We will let the trip to the Orient drop, now and forever. I can't go without little Edward, and you"—she gave him a radiant, rallying smile—"can't spare him, so we will just stay at home and see as much of each other as the old lawsuit will let you. And what I want to know," she added, with a touch

of indignation, "is, why do those lawyers of yours allow the matter to harass you? It is their business to take the care of it off your shoulders."

He stood silent throughout this speech, changing expressions flitting across his face, but it hardened upon the allusion to the lawsuit and his vacillation solidified into resolve.

"Come, Paula, this talk is idle; the matter is arranged. The Hardingtons start for New York tomorrow, and sail as soon as they strike the town. Mrs. Hardington says she will be enchanted to have you of her party, and I have telegraphed and received an answer engaging your stateroom on the ship. Your section in the Pullman is also reserved, —couldn't get the stateroom on the train—already taken, hang it."

She had risen to her feet and was gazing at him with a sort of averse amazement, once more pale and agitated, and with a strange difficulty of articulation. "Why, Edward, what do you mean? Why should you want to get me out of the country? There's something behind all this, evidently." She noted that he winced by so slight a token as the flicker of an eyelash. "You know that I would not consent to go without my child for any earthly consideration."

"I know no such thing, as I have told you," he retorted hotly. "The arrangements are all made. Your passage is taken. I have ready your letter of credit. I do think you are the most ungrateful wretch alive," he exclaimed, his eyes aglow with anger. "A beautiful and costly trip, that you have longed for, planned out for you in every detail, and you——" he broke off with a gesture of repudiation.

"I wouldn't be separated from my child for one night for all the jauntings about the globe that could be devised," she declared.

Floyd-Rosney suddenly lost all self-control. "Well, you certainly will be separated from him for one night—for many nights,—for he is gone!"

"Gone?" She sprang forward with a shriek and started toward the door. Then with a desperate effort to compose herself she paused even in the attitude of flight. "For God's sake, Edward, where has he gone? What do you mean?"

"He has been sent to the place where I propose to have him cared for in your absence. Knowing that your time is short I tried to smooth the way."

"But where?—where?"

"Where you shall not know,—you shall not follow. You may as well make up your mind to take the trip."

She seemed taller, to tower, as she drew herself up in her wrath, standing on the threshold in the ghastly incongruity of her festival evening gown and her tragic face. "Oh, you brute!" she shrilled at him. "You fiend!"

Then she turned and fled through the great square hall and up the massive staircase to the nursery that she had quitted so lately, that had been so full of cheer and cosy comfort and infantile laughter and caresses.

The room was empty now. The fire was low in the grate, seen through the bars of the high fender that kept the little fellow from danger of contact with the flames. The dull, spiritless, red glow of the embers enabled her to discern the switch to turn on the electric light, and instantly the apartment

sprang into keen visibility. The bed was vacant, the coverlets disarranged where the child had been taken thence, doubtless after he had fallen asleep. The drawers of the bureau, the doors of the wardrobe stood ajar, the receptacles ransacked of all his little garments, his hats and shoes. Evidently a trunk had been packed in view of a prolonged absence while she had sat downstairs in the library, all unconscious of the machinations in progress against her in her own home. She was numb with the realization of the tremendous import of the situation. She could not understand the motive—she only perceived the fact. It was her husband's scheme to get her out of the country, and he had fancied that he could force her to go without her child. She took no account of her grief, her fears, the surging anguish of separation. She was saying to herself as she turned into her own room adjoining that she must be strong in this crisis for the child's sake, as well as her own. She must discern clearly, and reason accurately, and act promptly and without vacillation. If she should remain here she might be seized and on some pretext coerced into leaving the country on that lovely trip which he had planned for her. She burst into a sudden bitter laugh, and the sound startled her into silence again. When had her husband ever planned aught for her save to serve some purpose of his own? She would not go—she would not, she said over and over to herself. Her determination, her instinct were to ascertain where the child had been hidden, and if possible to capture him; if not to be near, on the chance of seeing him sometimes, to watch over him, to guard him from danger. In her self-pity at this poor hope the tears welled up

and she shook with sobs. But on this momentary collapse ensued renewed strength. It might be, she thought, she could appeal to the law. She knew that her husband's was the superior claim to the child, but in view of his tender years, his delicate health in certain respects, might not a court grant his custody to his mother? At all events his restoration to her care was henceforward her one object, and if she allowed herself to be forced out of the country, to serve this unknown, unimagined whim of her cruel husband's, she might never see the child again.

A knock at the door startled her nerves like a clap of thunder. A maid had come to say that dinner had been served—indeed the butler had announced it an hour ago—and should it still wait?

"Have it taken down," Paula said with stiff lips. "Mr. Floyd-Rosney will not dine at home."

For Paula had heard the street door bang as she fled up the stairs, and she knew that he was not in the house. The girl gazed at her with a sharp point of curiosity in her little black eyes as she obsequiously withdrew. Despite the humility of the manner of her domestics Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had not the ascendancy in her household due a chatelaine so magnificently placed. It was his wealth—she was an appendage. It was his will that ruled, not hers. As the servants loved to remark to each other, "She has got no more say-so here than me," and the insecurity of her authority and the veneer of her position affected unfavorably the estimation in which she was held. The girl perceived readily enough that a clash had supervened between the couple and sagely opined that the master would have the best of it. Below stairs they ascribed to it the strange removal

of the child at this hour of the night and the change in their employer's plans for the evening. Their unrestrained voices came up through doors carelessly left ajar, along with the clatter of the dishes of the superfluous dinner, and Paula, with some unoccupied faculty, albeit all seemed burdened to the point of breaking with her heavy thoughts, realized that this breach of domestic etiquette could never have chanced had the master of the house been within its walls.

As she hastily divested herself of her dainty evening attire, with trembling fingers her spirits fell, her courage waned. No one would heed her, she said to herself. What value would a court attach to her representations as against the word and the will of a man of her husband's wealth and prominence? And how could she expect aught of aid from any quarter? She had literally no individual position in the world. She had no influence on her husband, no real hold on his heart. She could command not one moment's attention, save as his wife. Bereft of his favor and countenance she would be more of a nullity than a woman, poor but independent, working for a weekly wage. Truly Floyd-Rosney could ship her out of the country as if she were a mare or a cow. Decorum would forbid open resistance, for indeed if she clamored and protested she could be sent with a trained nurse as the victim of hysteria or monomania. She must get away. Her liberty was threatened. Her will had long been annulled, but now she was to be bodily bound and in effect carried whither she would not. Her liberty, her free agency were at stake—not her life. Never, she

thought, would he do a deed that would react upon himself. She must be gone—and swiftly.

Perhaps Paula never realized the extent of her subjection until when dressed in her dark coat suit with hat and gloves, her suitcase packed with a few indispensable articles, she stood at her dressing table and opened her gold mesh-bag with a sudden clutch at her heart to ascertain what money she might have. Her white face, so scornful of herself, looked back from the mirror, duplicating her bitter smile. She had not five dollars in the world. Floyd-Rosney never gave money to his wife in the raw, so to speak. All her extravagant appointments came as it were from his hand. She could buy as she would on his accounts; she could subscribe liberally to charities and public enterprises which he countenanced, and he made her signature as good as his, but she could never have undertaken the slightest plan of her own initiative. She had no command of money. She could not go—she could not get away from under his hand. She was as definitely a prisoner as if she were behind the bars. Still looking scornfully, pityingly, distressfully at her pallid image in the mirror, a strange thought occurred to her. She wondered if she were Ran Ducie's wife could she have been as poor as this. But she must go—and quickly. For one wild moment she contemplated borrowing from the servants the sum she needed. As she revolted at the degradation she realized its futility. Their place in his favor was more secure than hers—her necessity attested the tenuity of her position. They would not lend money to her in order to thwart him. She looked at the strings of pearls, the gold mesh-bag, and remembered the

pawnbroker. Once more she shivered back from her own thought. They were not hers, for her own. They were for her to wear, to illustrate his taste, his liberality to his wife, his wealth. She knew little of law, of life. This might be an actual theft. But she must go—and go at once.

With her suitcase in her hand she stole down the stairs and softly let herself out of the massive front door, closing it noiselessly behind her, never for a moment looking up at the broad, tall façade of the building that had been her home. She crossed the street almost immediately, lest she encounter her husband returning with his plans more definitely concluded and with a more complete readiness to execute them.

The night was not cold, but bland and fresh, and she felt the vague stir of the breeze like a caress on her cheek. The stars—they were strangers to her now, so long it had been since she had paused to look upon them—showed in a dark, moonless heaven high above the deep canyon of the street. She walked rapidly, despite the weight of the suitcase, but so long had it been since she had traversed the thoroughfares on foot that she had forgotten the turnings—now the affair of the chauffeur—and once she was obliged to retrace her way for a block. She deprecated the loss of time and the drain upon her strength, but she was still alert and active when she paused in the ladies' entrance of a hotel and stood waiting and looking about with her card in her hand. Oh, how strange for her, accustomed to be so considered, so attended, so heralded! She did not for the moment regret the coercion her splendors were

wont to exert. She only wondered how best to secure her object, if she could not win the attention of the supercilious and reluctant functionaries dully regarding her in the distance.

The lobby of the ladies' entrance opened upon the larger space of the office of the hotel, and here in a delicate haze of cigar smoke a number of men were standing in groups about the tessellated marble floor, or seated in the big armchairs placed at the base of the tall pillars. As fixing her eyes on the clerk behind the desk she placed her suitcase on the floor and started forward, he jangled a sharp summons on a hand bell, and a bell-boy detached himself from the coterie that had been nonchalantly regarding her, and loungingly advanced.

"Will you take that card to Mr. Randal Ducie?" she said, controlling her voice with difficulty.

"Ain't hyar," airily returned the darkey. He was about to turn away from this plainly dressed woman, who had no claim on any eagerness of service when his eyes chanced to fall on a token of quality above her seeming station. He suddenly noted the jeweled card case as she returned the card to it, and the gold mesh bag, and he vouchsafed pleasantly:

"I noticed myse'f the announcement in the evenin' paper, but it is his brudder stoppin' hyar."

That moment her eyes fell upon Adrian Ducie standing in one of the groups of men smoking in the office. Her impulse was like that of a drowning creature clutching at a straw. Without an instant of hesitation, without even a vague intention of appropriately employing the intermediary services of the limp bell-boy, with a wild, hysterical fear that a

moment's waiting would lose her the opportunity, she dashed into the midst of the office, and, speechless, and pallid, and trembling, she seized Adrian by the arm.

## CHAPTER XVIII

ADRIAN DUCIE looked in startled amazement down into her white, drawn face with its hollow, appealing eyes, and quivering lips that could not enunciate a word. He did not recognize her for one moment. Then his expression hardened, and his gaze grew steady. With dextrous fingers he took his hat from his head and his cigar from his lips with one hand, for she held the other arm with a grip as of steel. The moony luster of the electric lights shone down upon a scene as silent and as motionless as if, Gorgon-like, her entrance had stricken it into stone; the groups of men who had been smoking standing about the floor, the loungers in the arm-chairs, the clerks behind the counter were for the moment as if petrified, blankly staring.

"What can I do for you?" Adrian asked courteously, and the calm, clear tones of his voice pervaded the silence like the tones of a bell.

In her keen sensitiveness she noted the absence of any form of greeting or salutation. He would not call her name for the enlightenment of these gazing strangers in this public place, in the scene she had made. Oh, how could she have so demeaned herself, she wondered, as to need such protection, such observance on his part of the delicacy she had disregarded. She despised herself to have incurred the necessity, yet with both her little gloved hands she clung to his arm with a convulsive strength of grasp

which he could not have shaken off without a struggle that would have much edified the gazing crowd, all making their own inferences as to the unknown significance of the scene. Such good breeding as it individually possessed had begun to assert itself against the shock and numbing effects of surprise, and there was the sound of movement and the murmur of resumed conversation which induced Adrian Ducie to hope that the one word she suddenly gasped had not been overheard.

"Randal," she began in a broken voice, and the look in his eyes struck her dumb. They held a spark of actual fire that scorched every delicate sensibility within her. But it was like the ignition of a fuse—it set the whole train of gunpowder into potentiality. With sudden intention he looked over his shoulder and signaled to a gentleman at a little distance, staring, too, but not in the least recognizing Mrs. Floyd-Rosney.

"We will go into the reception room and talk the matter over," he said decisively. "Colonel Kenwynton will give us the benefit of his advice."

Colonel Kenwynton had been trained in the school of maneuvers and strategy. Off came his hat from his old white head, and with a resonant "Certainly! Certainly!" he advanced on the other side of Paula, who noticed that he followed Ducie's example and did not speak her name. "Good evening, good evening, madam, I trust I see you well!" was surely salutation enough to satisfy the most exacting requirements of etiquette.

Scarcely able to move, yet never for one instant relaxing her hold on Ducie's arm, she suffered herself to be led, half supported, to the reception room,

where she sank into an armchair while Ducie stood looking down at her.

"Oh, Mr. Ducie," she cried plangently, "I had hoped to find Randal here—his arrival was in the paper. I am in such terrible trouble, and I know my old friend would feel for me. Oh, he loved me once! I know he would help me now!"

"I will do whatever Randal could," said Ducie. His voice was suave and kind, but his face was stern, and doubtful, and inquiring.

"Oh, you look so like him—you might have a heart like his. But you are not like him. Oh, I have not another friend in the world!"

Adrian thought she had not deserved to account Randal Ducie her friend. But this was no occasion to make nice and formal distinctions. He only said:

"Randal is not in town. But if you will give me the opportunity to be of use to you, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, I will do anything I can."

Both her auditors thought for a moment that she was insane when she replied:

"I want you to lend me ten dollars."

The two men exchanged a glance. Then Ducie heartily declared:

"Why, that is very easily done. But may I ask, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, what use you wish to make of it?"

He was thinking the trifling sum was yet sufficient to work mischief if she were under some temporary aberration.

"I want to go to my aunt's place in the uplands of Mississippi—my old home! Oh, how I wish I had never left it!"

She threw herself back in the chair and pressed

her handkerchief to her streaming eyes. "Mr. Ducie, I have fled from my husband's house. He has taken my child from me—spirited him away—and I don't know where he is, nor how he will be cared for. He is only three years old—oh, just a little thing!"

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, you must control your voice," said Ducie, embarrassed and reluctant. "I hate to say it—but you will bring the whole house about us."

Once launched on a recital of her woes she had acquired a capacity to arrange her ideas, and was keenly noting the effect of her words. There was no alacrity to produce the money she had requested as a loan, corresponding to the prompt acquiescence of Adrian Ducie a moment or so ago. She marveled in humble anxiety, not knowing that the two men doubted her mental responsibility, and feared to trust her with money.

Her griefs, once released, strained for expression, and she went on in a meek, muffled tone that brought the tears to the old Colonel's pitying eyes—his heart had grown very soft with advancing years—but Adrian Ducie held himself well in hand and regarded her with critical dispassionateness.

"My husband desires, for some reason which he does not explain, but which I suspect, to get me out of the country."

Once more Colonel Kenwynton and Ducie exchanged a covert glance of comment.

"He has arranged an extensive European and Oriental tour for me—without my child—leaving my child for a year at least. Why, Colonel Kenwynton, tell me what would all the glories of for-

eign capitals and all the associations of Palestine count for with me when the one little face that I care to see is far away, and the one little voice I cannot hear!"

"Oh, my dear madam"—the Colonel had a frog in his throat—"surely Mr. Floyd-Rosney would not insist. You must be mistaken!"

"Oh, it is all arranged—my passage taken; my letter of credit ready; my party—such a gay party—made up and prepared to start to-morrow, the Hardingtons——"

The Colonel's face bore a sudden look of conviction.

"I recollect now—it had slipped my memory—Mr. Charles Hardington was telling me this evening of the tour his family have in contemplation, and he mentioned that they were to have the great pleasure of your company, starting to-morrow."

"Oh, but I will not go! I will not!" cried Paula, springing from her chair and frantically clasping her hands. "I will not go without my child! If you will not help me I will hide in the streets—but he could find me and—as I have not one friend—he could lock me up as insane!" She turned her wild eyes from one to the other. Then she broke into a jeering laugh. "It would be very easy in this day to prove a woman insane who does not prefer the tawdry follies and frivolities of gadding and staring through Europe with a party of fashionable empty-pates to the care and companionship of her only child. But I will not! I will not be shipped out of the country!"

Adrian Ducie's face had changed. He believed that Floyd-Rosney was capable of any domestic

tyranny, but however he moved the responsibility involved in her appeal was great. He could not consign her to whatever fate might menace her. Still, he dared not trust her with money. She might buy poison, she might buy a pistol.

"Colonel, we must do something," he declared. Then he turned to her. "Mrs. Floyd-Rosney," he said, "will you permit us, instead of handing you the small amount you mentioned, to buy your ticket for your aunt's home and see you aboard the train?"

In one moment her face was radiant.

"Oh, if you only would! If you only would! I should bless and thank you to the end of my days!"

Adrian Ducie, with a clearing brow, crossed the room and touched the bell. The summons was answered so immediately as to suggest the prompting of a lurking curiosity.

"Time-table," said Ducie, and when it was brought he rid himself of the officious bell-boy by commanding: "Taxi, at the ladies' entrance."

"We must be starting at once," he said to Paula. "We have barely time to catch the train. Bring the lady's suitcase," to the returning servant; and to the veteran: "Come, Colonel, you will kindly accompany us."

Then they took their way out into the night.

Paula felt as if she trod on air. It had been so long since she had done aught of her own initiative, so little liberty had she possessed, even in trifles, that it gave her a sense of power to be able to carry any plan of her own device into successful execution. She was suddenly hopeful, calm, confident of her judgment, and restored to her normal aspect and manner. As they stood for a moment on the sidewalk,

while the cab came chugging to the curb, she looked as with the eyes of a restored vitality upon the familiar surroundings—the electric street lights, the brilliant, equidistant points far down the perspective, the fantastic illuminated advertisements, the tall canyon of the buildings, the obstructive passing of a clanging, whirring street car, and then she was handed into the vehicle by Adrian Ducie. The next moment the door banged, and she was shut in with the two who she felt were so judiciously befriending her. The taxicab backed out into the street and was off for Union Station at a speed as rapid as a liberal construction of the law would allow.

There was no word said, and for that she was grateful. Her eyes stung as if blistered by the bitter tears she had shed, but not for one moment would she let the restful lids fall, lest the face of the man before her vanish in the awakening from this dream of rescue. She watched the fluctuations of light on Ducie's countenance as the arc lamp at every street intersection illuminated it, for she found a source of refreshment in its singular likeness to the one friend, she told herself, she had in the world. Adrian would not have lent himself as he had done to her aid, she felt sure, were he not Randal's brother. She had been vaguely sensible of a reluctance that was to her inexplicable, of a reserve in both the men before her, that seemed to her inimical to her interest. She would venture no word to jar the accord they had attained.

When the taxicab drew up at the Union Station the glare of lights, the stir of the place enthused her. She was here at last, on her way, success almost attained. She did not share Ducie's sudden

fever of anxiety in noting the great outpouring of smoke from the shed where the train stood almost ready to start, the resonance of its bell and the clamors of the exhaust steam of the engine already beginning to jar the air. He ran swiftly up the stair to the ticket office, leaving her with Colonel Kenwinton, and was back almost immediately, taking her protectively by the arm as he urged her along into the great shed. At the gate she was surprised to see that he presented three tickets, but he voluntarily explained, not treating her as an unreasoning child, as was Floyd-Rosney's habit, that he thought it best that he and the Colonel should accompany her to the first station, to see her fairly clear of the city. He was saying this as they walked swiftly down between the many rows of rails in the great shed where a number of cars were standing, and the train which she was to take was beginning to move slowly forward.

Her heart sank as she marked its progress, but Ducie lifted his arm and signed eagerly to the conductor just mounting the front step of the Pullman. The train slowed down a bit; the stool was placed by the alert porter, but the step passed before she could put her foot upon it. Ducie caught her up and swung her to the next platform as it glided by, and the two men clambered aboard as the cars went on.

They were laughing and elated as they conveyed her into its shelter. Then a deep shade settled on the face of the Colonel.

“Why, my dear madam, you have no luncheon!” He regarded the suitcase with reprobation, as af-

fording no opportunities of refreshment, save of the toilette.

"But, Colonel, I don't lunch throughout the night," she returned, with a smile. "I shall be glad to sleep," she added plaintively.

The Colonel looked disconsolate for a moment. Then he took a handsome little flask from his pocket. "With my best compliments," he said.

"But I don't drink brandy, either," she declared, strangely flattered, "and I have no pistol pocket."

"Tuck it in your suitcase," he insisted seriously. "Something might happen. You might—might—see fit to faint, you know."

"Oh, no, I never faint," she protested. "If I haven't fainted so far I shall hold my own the rest of the way."

As they sat in the section which Dicie had reserved for her the Colonel eyed him enigmatically, as if referring something for his approval. Then he said bluffly:

"I am sorry I haven't the ten dollars which you did us the honor to wish to borrow. I have nothing less than a twenty, that you can get changed by the conductor and return to me at your good pleasure. I'm getting rich, Mrs. Floyd-Rosney," he laughed gaily, at the incongruity of the jest. "And I never carry anything but large bills."

He took the little empty mesh bag from her hand and slipped the money in it, despite her protest that she had now no need of it.

"It is never prudent to travel without an emergency fund," he opined sagaciously. "My affairs are managed by Hugh Treherne now, for a share of the proceeds. He did not want any compensation

at all, but I insisted on it. Wonderful head for detail he has, DUCIE. I'd go to the asylum and stay there a term or two if it would educate me to make every edge cut as he can."

When they had alighted on the platform of the first station and stood lifting their hats, as her pale face looked out of the window while the train glided on, Colonel Kenwynton spoke his mind.

"She is as sane as I am, and a fine, well-bred woman. She has married a brute of a husband, and if I were not such an excellent Christian, DUCIE, I don't know what I wouldn't wish might happen to him."

DUCIE said nothing. Floyd-Rosney was a distasteful subject that he was averse to discuss. They took their places in the electric street car which would whisk them back to town speedily, and, as the train slowly backed on the switch, she saw them through the window, as yet the sole occupants on the return run.

## CHAPTER XIX

IF Floyd-Rosney's temper were less imperious, if he had had less confidence in the dictates of his will, which he misconstrued as his matured judgment, he could not have so signally disregarded the feelings of others; if only in obedience to the dictates of policy, he could not have been so oblivious of the possibility of adverse action, successfully exploited.

Maddened by his wife's revolt against his plans, futile though he deemed it, he would not await her return from the nursery whither she had hurried to verify his words. He burned with rage under the lash of her fiery denunciation—"Brute!—Fiend!" How dared she! He wondered that he had not beaten her with his clenched fists! He had some fear of being betrayed into violence, some doubt of his own self-restraint that induced him to rush forth into the street and evade her frenzied jeremiad when she found the child was indeed gone.

What a fool of a woman was this, he was arguing before the banging of the front door behind him had ceased to resound along the street. What other one would turn down such a beautiful opportunity! As to leaving the child—why, it would have been to any except the perverse vixen he had married one of the special advantages of the outing—to be free for a time of domestic cares, of maternal duties.

Had he not over and over heard women of her station congratulate themselves on a "vacation"—the children loaded off on somebody, Heaven knows whom, or where, a matter of minor importance. It was absolutely fantastic, the idea of dragging a child of Edward's age around Europe and the Orient for a year's travel. The very care of him, the necessary solicitude involved at every move, would destroy all possibility of pleasure. The mere item of infantile disorders was enough in itself to nullify the prospect. And he might die of some of these maladies in a foreign country, deprived of his father's supervision and experience in the ways of the world.

Floyd-Rosney's contention in the matter seemed to him eminently right and rational. It was desirable that she should not testify in the suit, he could not leave at this crisis, and she could not well take the child with her. He would not risk his son and heir to the emergencies, the vicissitudes of a year of foreign travel under the guidance merely of an inexperienced and careless woman. Paula herself was like a child. He had kept her so. Everything had been done for her. In any unforeseen, disastrous chance she would be utterly helpless to take judicious action and to protect the child from injury.

Floyd-Rosney was not more willing to be separated from the boy than the mother herself. He had, indeed, no unselfish love for the child, but his son's beauty and promise flattered his vanity; the boy would be a credit to his name. His prospects were so brilliant that in twenty years there would be no young man in the Mississippi Valley who could vie with him in fortune and position.

Floyd-Rosney had gloated on the future of his son. He was glad, he often said, that he was himself a young man, for he would be but in the prime of life when Edward would come to his majority. No dependent station would be his—to eat from his father's hand like a fawning pet. With an altruistic consideration, uncharacteristic of him, the father had made already certain investments in his son's name, and these, though limited in character, by a lucky stroke had doubled again and again, till he was wont to say proudly that his son was the only capitalist he knew who had an absolutely safe investment paying twenty per cent. He had a sort of respect for the boy, as representing much money and many inchoate values. His infancy must be carefully tended, his education liberal and sedulously supervised, and when he should go into the world, representing his father's name and fortune, he should be worthy of both. Turn him over to Paula, in his tender callowness, to be dragged about from post to pillar for her behoof—he would not endure the idea.

As the cool air chilled his temper and the swift walk and change of scene gave the current of his thoughts a new trend he began to be more tolerant of her attitude in the matter. The truth was, he said to himself, they each loved the child too dearly, were too solicitous for his well being, to be willing to be separated from him, and, but for the peculiar circumstances of this lawsuit, he would never have proposed it. It was, however, necessary, absolutely necessary, and he would take measures to induce Paula to depart on this delightful journey without making public her disinclination. He had taken

her, perhaps, too abruptly by surprise. She was overcome with frenzy to discover that the child was actually gone!—he should overlook her hasty words—though to his temperament this was impossible, and he knew it; they were burned indelibly into his consciousness. Never before, in all his pompous, prosperous life had he been so addressed. But he would make an effort—one more effort to persuade her; with a resolute fling he turned to retrace his way, coming into the broad and splendid avenue on which his palatial home fronted, he walked up the street as she was walking down the opposite side.

He let himself in with his latch-key, closing the door softly behind him. The great hall and the lighted rooms with their rich furnishings, glimpsed through the open doors, looked strangely desolate. For one moment silence—absolute, intense. Then a grotesque, unbecoming intrusion on the ornate elegance—a burst of distant, uncultured laughter from below stairs, and a clatter of dishes. Floyd-Rosney was something of an epicure, and it was a good dinner that went down untouched. The master of the house frowned heavily. He lifted his head, minded to ring a bell and administer reproof. Then he reflected that it well accorded with his interests that he should be supposed to be out of the house while the interview with his wife was in progress. She had a way of late of raising her voice in a keen protest that advertised domestic discordances to all within earshot. "Let the servants carouse and gorge their dinner; I'll settle them afterward!" he said to himself grimly, as he noiselessly ascended the stairs.

Once more silence—he could not hear even his

own footfall. He had a vague sense of solitude, of uninhabited purlieus. With a sudden rush of haste he pushed open the door of the nursery, flaring with lights, but vacant, and strode through to his wife's room, to find it vacant, too. He stood for a moment, mystified, anger in his eyes, but dismay, fear, doubt clutching at his heart. What did this mean? He went hastily from one to another of the suite of luxurious rooms devoted to her especial use, but in none save one was any token of her recent presence. He stood staring at the disarray. There was the gown of lavender gauze that she had donned for the opera, lying on a chair, while the silk slip that it had covered lay huddled on the floor. The slippers, hastily thrust off, tripped his unwary step as he advanced into the room. On the dressing table, glittering with a hundred articles of toilet luxury, lay the two strings of costly pearls "where anyone might have stolen them"; he mechanically reproved her lack of precaution. He strove to reassure himself, to contend against a surging sense of calamity. What did this signify? Only that the festivity of the evening relinquished she had laid aside her gala attire. Her absence—it was early—she might have gone out with some visitor; she might have cared to make some special call, so seldom did they have an evening unoccupied. Despite the incongruity of the idea with the recollection of her pale, drawn, agonized face, the frenzy of her grief and rage, he took down the receiver of the telephone and called up Hildegarde Dean. The moment the connection was completed he regretted his folly. Over the wire came the vibrations of a string-orchestra, and he recalled having noticed in the society columns

of the papers that Miss Dean was entertaining with a dinner dance to compliment a former schoolmate. He had lost his poise sufficiently, nevertheless, to make the query, "Is Mrs. Floyd-Rosney there?" and had the satisfaction to be answered by the butler, in the pomp and pride of the occasion: "No, sah. Dis entertainment is exclusively for unmarried people."

"The devil it is!" Floyd-Rosney exclaimed, after, however, cautiously releasing the receiver.

His fuming humor was heightened by this *contretemps*, although a great and growing dismay was vaguely shadowed in his eyes, like a thought in the back of the mind, so to speak, too unaccustomed, too preposterous, to find ready expression. He endeavored to calm himself, although he lost no time in prosecuting his investigations. With a hasty hand he touched the electric bell for his wife's maid and impatiently awaited the response. To his surprise it was not prompt. He stood amidst his incongruous surroundings of gowns, and jewels, and slippers, and laces, and revolving panels of mirrors, frowning heavily. How did it chance that her service should be so dilatory? He placed his forefinger on the button and held it there, and the jangling was still resounding below stairs when the door slowly opened and the maid, with an air of affronted inquiry, presented herself. Her face changed abruptly as she perceived the master of the house, albeit it was like pulling a cloak of bland superserviceableness over her lineaments of impudent protest.

"What do you mean by being so slow to answer

this bell?" he thundered, his angry eyes contemptuously regarding her.

"I came as soon as I heard it, sir. I think there must be something wrong with the annunciator."

"What do you mean by leaving your mistress's gowns lying around, and her room in this disorder?"

The girl's beady eyes traveled in bewilderment from one article to another of the turmoil of toilet accessories scattered about the apartment. She had looked for a moment as if she would fire up at the phrase "your mistress," and she said with a slight emphasis on the title:

"I didn't know that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had changed."

"Where has she gone?"

Once more a dull and genuine bewilderment on the maid's face.

"I am sure, sir, I don't know—she didn't ring for me."

"I reckon you didn't answer the bell," Floyd-Rosney sneered. "She couldn't wait forever. She hasn't my patience."

The girl glowered at his back, but, mindful of the mirrors, forbore the grimace so grateful in moments of disaffection to her type.

Floyd-Rosney was speaking through the house telephone.

"Have the limousine at the door—yes—immediately."

The ready response of the chauffeur came over the wire.

"Now see what gown she wore, so that I can guess where to send for her. A nice business this is—that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney can't get hold of her

maid to change her dress and leave a message. I don't doubt there is a note somewhere, if I could find it."

He affected to toss over the *mélange* on the dressing-table. He even looked at the evening paper lying on the foot-rest, which she had read while her hair was being dressed for the opera.

As he did so an item of personal mention caught his attention. Mr. Randal Ducie was in the city, doubtless in connection with the gathering of planters to consult with the Levee Commission in regard to river protection. A meeting would be held this evening at the Adelantado Hotel.

This was the most natural thing in the world. Half the planters in the river bottom were in active coöperation seeking to influence the Levee Commission, or the State Legislature, or the Federal Government to take some adequate measures to prevent the inundation of their cotton lands by a general overflow of the great Mississippi River, according to the several prepossessions relative to the proper plans, and means, and agency to that end.

But as he read the haphazard words of the paragraph the blood flared fiercely in Floyd-Rosney's face; a fire glowed in his eyes, hot and furious; his hand was trembling; his breath came quick. And he was well nigh helpless even to conjecture if his wife's absence had aught of connection with this ill-starred appearance of the lover of her girlhood. He—Edward Floyd-Rosney, baffled, hoodwinked, set at naught! Could this thing be!

For one moment, for one brief moment, he upbraided himself. But for his tyranny in sending off the child without her consent, without even con-

sulting her, but for his determination that, willing or no, she should expatriate herself for a year, and, with neither husband nor child, tour a foreign country in company of his selection they might already be seated in their box at the opera, rapt by the concord of sweet sounds in the midst of the most elegant and refined presentment of their world, at peace with each other and in no danger of damaging and humiliating revelations of domestic discord.

He heard the puffing of the limousine at the curb below the windows, and he turned to the maid.

"I can find no scrape of a pen—no note here. Do you know what gown she wore?"

The girl had made a terrifying discovery. As she fingered the skirts hanging in the wardrobe, for she had thought first of the demi-toilette of usual evening wear, she was reflecting on the gossip below stairs, where it was believed that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had not known of the departure of her little son till he was out of the house, and where it was surmised she would be all "tore up" when she should discover his absence—so much she made of the boy. Aunt Dorothy had been given permission to spend the night with her granddaughter who lived on the opposite side of the river, a favorite excursion with the ancient colored retainer. She was not popular with the coterie below stairs, and, being prone to report what went amiss, would certainly have notified her young mistress if any attempt had been made to spirit away the child while in her charge. The maid had found naught missing from among the dresses most likely to be worn on any ordinary occasion in the evening, and she was turning away reluctantly to examine the boxes in the closet

where were stored those gowns of grander pretension, designed for functions of special note. She had a discontented frown on her face, for they were enveloped, piece by piece, in many layers of tissue paper; she could not ascertain what was there and what was gone, from the wrappers, save by actual investigation; among them were sachets of delicate perfumes that must not be mixed; they had trains and draperies difficult to fold, and berthas and sashes that must be laid in the same creases as before—a job requiring hours of work, and useless, for no gown of this sort could have been worn without assistance in dressing, and for an occasion long heralded. As she closed the wardrobe with a pettish jerk it started open the other door, and she paused with an aghast look on her face. She was afraid of Mr. Floyd-Rosney when he was angry.

"She has worn her coat-suit of taupe broadcloth," she said in a bated voice, and with a wincing, deprecatory glance at him, "and the hat to match."

Floyd-Rosney received this information in silence. Then—"Why do you look like that, you fool?" he thundered.

"'C—c—cause," stuttered the girl, "she has taken her suit-case—it was always kept on the shelf here, packed with fresh lingerie, so she might be ready for them quick little auto trips you like to go on so often, and her walking boots is gone"—holding up a pair of boot-trees,—"and," opening a glove box, "the suède taupe gloves is gone." Her courage asserted itself; her temper flared up. "And it seems to me, Mr. Floyd-Rosney, that if there's any fool here, 'taint me!"

"You will be paid your wages to-morrow,"

foamed Floyd-Rosney, dashing from the room.  
"Clear out of the house."

"Just as well," the girl said to the gaping servants downstairs, who remonstrated with her for her sharp tongue, reproaching her with throwing away a good place, liberal wages and liberal fare. "Just as well. If there's to be no lady there's no use for a lady's maid."

"To the Union Station," Floyd-Rosney hissed forth as he flung himself into the limousine. In the transit thither he took counsel within himself. Where could Paula be going?—Only on some fantastic quest for her child. He ran over, in his mind, any hint that he might have let drop as to the locality where he had bestowed him, and she, putting two and two together, had fancied she had discovered the place. If, by any coincidence, she had hit upon the boy's domicile, he told himself, he would make no protest; he would let her have her way; he would give the world for all to be between them as it was this afternoon. As to the lawsuit—let come what might! If only he could intercept her in this mad enterprise; if he could reach her before she took the train! He called through the speaking tube to the chauffeur to go faster.

"Never mind the speed limit—do all you know how!"

Presently the great vehicle slowed up, panting and sizzling as if winded in the race. He sprang out before it had ceased to move and rushed up the stairs, patrolling the various apartments, the ladies' waiting room, the refreshment room—he remembered that she could have had no dinner—the general ante-room, with its crowd of the traveling pub-

lic. He was a notable figure, with his splendid appearance, his fur-lined overcoat, his frowning, intent brow, his long, swift stride.

All in vain—she was not there. The clamor of the train that was making ready for departure struck his absorbed attention. The place was full of the odor of the bituminous smoke from the locomotive; he heard the panting of the steam exhaust.

Floyd-Rosney rushed down the stairs and into the great shed which seemed, with its high vaulted roof, clouded with smoke dull and dim, despite the glare here and there of electric lights. He was stopped in the crowd at the gate. He had no ticket—money could not buy it here. He explained hastily that he wished to see a friend off. The regulations were stringent, the functionary obdurate; the crowd streaming through the gate disposed to stare, and a burly policeman, lounging about, regarded the insistent swell with an inimical glare. For there are those dressed like swells that are far from that puffed-up estate.

The suggestion calmed Floyd-Rosney for the nonce. It needed but this, he felt, to complete his folly—to involve himself in a futile fracas with a gateman and a cop. Moreover, he had no justification in fancying that Paula was likely to take a train—in fact, and he smiled grimly, she would not have the cash to buy a ticket. The whole theory that she might quit the city was a baseless fabrication of his fears, of the disorder of his ideas induced by the vexatious and unexpected *contrestemps*. Doubtless, by this time she had returned from the stroll or the call, or whatever device she had adopted to quiet her spirit and divert her mind, he argued—

he himself had found refreshment in a brisk walk in the night air—and was now sitting before the fire at home, awaiting his coming, possibly willing to discuss the matter in a more amicable frame of mind.

He was about to turn aside when suddenly down the line of rails within the shed and between the train standing still and the one beginning to move, the metallic clangor of its bell insistently jarring the air, he saw the figure of Paula, visible in the glare of the headlight of the locomotive beside her. Every detail was as distinct, as illuminated as in the portrayal of a magic lantern—her taupe gown, her hat with a plume of the same shade, her face flushed, laughing and eager. A man was assisting her to mount the platform of the coach and in him Floyd-Rosney was sure he recognized Randal Ducie, whose arrival in the city he had noted in the evening paper. The whole maneuver of boarding the train,—the placing of the stool by the porter, Paula's failure to reach from it to the step of the car, the swift muscular effort by which Ducie seized her, swung her to the platform, and then sprang upon it himself,—was all as plain to the frenzied man watching the vanishing train from between the palings of the gate as if the scene had been enacted within ten feet of him.

## CHAPTER XX

PAULA reached her destination early the next morning. She had not slept during the night and as soon as the light began to dawn she raised the blind at her window and lay in her berth looking out drearily at the face of the country, growing constantly more familiar, but yet dimly descried and colorless as a scene in sepia, with the lagging night still clinging to the earth. Belts of white vapor lay in every depression; the forests along the horizon made a dark circumference for the whole; the stars were wan and sad of aspect and faded from the sky, one by one, as the eye dwelt upon them. The characteristic features of the swamp region had vanished. In many places the land was deeply gullied, showing as the day waxed a richly tinted red clay that made the somber landscape glow. Everywhere were the hedges of the evergreen Cherokee rose, defining the borders of fields, often untrimmed and encroaching in a great green billow on spaces unmeet for a mere boundary mark. The trees were huge; gigantic oaks and the spreading black-gum; and she was ready, her hat on, her wrap and furs adjusted, looking out eagerly at these dense bosky growths when the red wintry sun began to cast long shafts of quiet dull sheen adown their aisles, showing the white rime on the rough bark of the

boughs, or among the russet leaves, still persistently clinging. More than once the conductor came in to consult her as to the precise point of stoppage, and, when a long warning whistle set the echoes astir in the quiet matutinal atmosphere and the train began to slow down, she was alertly on her feet.

"You are sure of the place, ma'am?" said the conductor, helping her descend the step; he was new to the road, and there seemed to him nothing here but woods.

She reassured him as she lightly ran down the steep incline, and then she stood for a moment, mechanically watching the train, epitome of the world, sweeping away and leaving her here, the dense forest before her, the smoke flaunting backward, the sun emblazoning its convolutions, the wondering faces of the passengers at the windows.

She remembered the time when this wonder would have nettled her. She had wanted a station platform built here, but her uncle had utilitarian theories, and, somehow, "never got round to it," as he was wont to phrase it. So seldom, indeed, they boarded the train, so seldom it brought a visitor, that it seemed to him the least and last needed appurtenance of the plantation. She wondered if the stoppage had been not noted at the house. The woods were silent, as with mystery, as she took her way through "the grove." The frost lay white on the grass, and there was even a glint of ice in the water lurking in the ruts of a wagon wheel in the road. She walked on these frozen edges after a fashion learned long ago to keep her feet dainty when not so expensively shod as now. Suddenly she heard the deep baying of a hound.

"Oh, old Hero!" she exclaimed pettishly. "He will tell them all I have come!"

For she had wished to slip in unobserved. The humiliation of her return in this wise seemed less when the kindly old roof should be above her head. But the dog met her, fierce and furious, at the fence of the door yard—how she had hated that fence; she had wanted the grove and yard thrown together like some fine park. As the old retainer recognized her the complication of his barks which he could not forego, in view of her capacity as stranger, with his wheezes and whines of ecstasy, as greeting to an old friend, while he leaped and gamboled about her, brought her uncle and aunt, every chick and child, the servants from the outhouses, and all the dogs on the place to make cheerful acclaim of welcome.

So long had it been since she had heard this hearty, genuine note of disinterested affection that it came like balm to her lacerated heart, and suddenly there seemed no more need for pride, for dissimulation, for self-restraint. She broke down and burst into a flood of tears, the group lachrymose in sympathy and wiping their eyes.

She had planned throughout the night how best and when to tell her story, but it was disclosed without preface or method, before she had been in the house ten minutes, her aunt cautiously closing the door of the sitting-room the instant Mr. Floyd-Rosney's name was mentioned and her uncle looking very grave.

"You were quite right in coming at once to us, my dear," he said kindly. "Be sure you shall not be shipped out of the country."

He was a tall, heavy man, somewhat spare and angular, and his large well-formed features expressed both shrewdness and kindness. He had abundant grizzled hair and his keen gray eyes were deeply set under thick dark eyebrows. He was a fair-minded man one could see at a glance, a thoroughly reliable man in every relation of life, a gentleman of the old school.

"Some arrangement will surely be made about the baby; I shall love to see the little fellow again. Set your heart at rest. I will communicate at once with Mr. Floyd-Rosney, as your nearest relative, standing in *loco parentis*."

"And give me some breakfast," said Paula, lapsing into the old childish whine of a spoiled household pet. "I have had nothing to eat since yesterday at lunch."

The husband and wife exchanged a glance over her head.

"And before I forget it——" she raised herself to an upright position and took from her bag the twenty dollar bill. "Please write and return this to old Colonel Kenwynton. I should be ashamed to sign my name to such a letter. He *would* lend it to me—though I didn't need it after he and Adrian Ducie—Randal Ducie's brother—had lent me the money to buy my ticket."

Mrs. Majoribanks was a stern-faced woman with rigid ideas of the acceptable in conduct. Her dark hair, definitely streaked with gray, banded smoothly along her high forehead, her serious, compelling, gray eyes, the extreme neatness and accuracy of adjustment of her dress, her precise method of enunciation, intimated an uncompromising person-

ality, possessing high ideals religiously followed,—somewhat narrow of view, perhaps, and severe of judgment, but unfalteringly, immovably upright.

"But, Paula, why didn't you buy your own ticket with your own money? To allow another to buy it was inappropriate."

"I had no money," Paula explained humbly. "Mr. Floyd-Rosney lets me buy anything I want on account, but he never gives me any money to spend as I like." Once more the husband and wife looked significantly at each other. All that they possessed was his, but the privileges of ownership were exercised in common, the expenditures a matter of mutual confidence and agreement, and it may be doubted if he ever took a step in business affairs without consultation with her.

The spare, sober decorum of the aspect of the house appealed to Paula in her present state of mind, her taste for magnificence glutted, and she remembered, with a sort of wonder, her intolerance of the stiff old furniture of the sitting-room covered with hair-cloth; the crimson brocade, well frayed, of the parlor glimpsed through the open door, with the old-fashioned lambrequins at the windows and carefully mended lace curtains, and the family portraits in oil on the walls; the linoleum on the floor of the hall that had been there seeming indestructible since she could remember; the barometer hanging over the long sofa; the grandfather's clock in the corner, still allotting the hours, however lives might wax or wane; the dining-room, with the burly sideboard and the peacock fly-brush, and the white-jacketed waiter, and the brisk little darkey that ran in and out with the relays of hot buttered waffles.

It all seemed so sane, so simple, so safe. Here and there, conspicuously placed, were gifts which she and Mr. Floyd-Rosney had made, ostentatiously handsome. She thought them curiously out of accord with the tone of the place, and, oddly enough, she felt ashamed of them.

She asked herself how and why had such an obsession as had possessed her ever come to her—the hankering for the empty life of show, and fashion, and wealth. Had she not had every reasonable wish gratified, enjoyed every advantage of a solid and careful education, had every social opportunity in a circle, limited, certainly, but characterized by refinement, and dignity, and seemliness, that was the gentility of long traditions of gentlefolks—not pretty manners, picked up the day before yesterday. She had come back to it now—her wings clipped, her feathers drooping.

She could not enter into the old home life as of yore—it seemed strangely alien, though so familiar. She would look vaguely at her young cousins, each altered and much more mature in the five years that had passed since she was an inmate of the household—well grown, handsome, intelligent boys they were, instead of the romping children she had left. They spent the mornings with a tutor who came from the neighboring town to read with them, and the eldest was much given to argument with his father, insisting vivaciously on his theories of government, of religion, of politics, of the proper method of construing certain Latin verses; the two younger were absorbed in their dogs, their rabbits, their games—the multitudinous little interests of people of their age, so momentous to them. Al-

ways their world was home—she wondered what the real world would seem to them when they should emerge into it, what the theories of government, the phrasing of Latin verses, the home absorptions would prove as preparation for life as she knew it. Certainly they did not formulate it. She said to herself that a more secluded existence could hardly be matched outside a monastery. She did not believe any of the three had ever seen a game of football or baseball; the life of cities, of travel, of association with their fellows was as a sealed book to them. In their minds Ingleside was a realm; their father was their comrade; their mother was the court of last resort.

But Paula's absorbed thoughts refused all but the slightest speculation upon the subject of their future and she could urge herself to only the shadow of interest in her aunt's pursuits and absorptions. Even the room of her girlhood—she could not enter there, she could not sleep there, for dreams—dreams—dreams! They might have there faculties of visualization or unseen they could stab her unaware. Never again should her spirit encounter these immaterial essences. She asked her aunt to give her her grandmother's room. It was small comfort in laying her head on that pillow which had never known a selfish thought, an unsanctified desire, to feel the difference, the distance. But here all good influences abode, and she was consoled in a sort for the unappreciated affliction of that saintly death, to whisper into the downy depth—"I have come back—scourged—scourged!"

How she remembered that that good grandmother had so grievously deprecated the course

toward Randal Ducie; that she had declared the greatest of all disasters is a marriage without love, and that a promise is a promise; many times she shook her head, and shed some shy, shy tears over Randal's dismissal, though Paula wrote the letter in a frenzy of careless energy, without erasing a word or troubling to take a copy.

She would note with a sort of apologetic affection the details of this familiar room that she had early learned to stigmatize as old-fashioned, and in her schoolgirl phrase "tacky"—the chintz curtains with their big flowers; the hair-cloth covered rocking chairs; the four-poster mahogany bedstead with its heavily corniced tester, the red cloth goffered to the center to focus in a big gilt star; the mahogany bureau, so tall that the mirror made good headway to the ceiling; the floriated Brussels carpet so antique of pattern that she used to say she believed it was manufactured before the flood and so staunch of web that it was destined to last till doomsday; the little work-table, with its drawers still filled with spools, and buttons, and reels of embroidery silk, and balls of wool for knitting and crochet—doubtless some piece of her grandmother's beautiful handiwork still lay where her busy fingers had placed it, with the needle yet in the stitch.

The rose curtained window gave on no smiling scene—it was one of the few outlooks from the house that was not of bosky presentment. But the grove had ceased ere these precincts were reached and the view was of a dull bit of pasture and beyond a dreary stretch of cornfields, in which the stalks still stood, stripped of the ears, pallid with frost and writhen into fantastic postures by wind

and weather. It was but a dreary landscape, trembling under slanting lines of rain, and later of sleet, for the halcyon weather had vanished at last, and winter had come in earnest. A mist hung much of the time between the earth and a leaden sky, and the woods that lay along the low horizon were barely glimpsed as a dull, indistinct smudge.

Nothing, she said to herself, could ever rehabilitate the universe for her. This crisis was so comprehensive, so significant. She clenched her hands when she reviewed the past few years with a nervous fury so intense that the nails marked the palms. Her memories and her self-reproach seared her consciousness like hot iron. Whelmed in the luxury of wealth, proud of her preëminence of station, sharing as far as might be her husband's domineering assumptions toward others, cravenly submitting when his humor required her, too, to crook the knee, she had subverted her every opinion, her inmost convictions, to theories of life she would once have despised, to estimate as of paramount value the things she had been taught to hold as dross. She had cast aside all her standards of intrinsic worth. Sometimes she would spring from sleep and walk the floor, the red glow of the embers on the wall, the shadows glooming about her, the events of those tumultuous years, in the fierce white light of actuality rather than the glimpses of memories, deploying before her. Resist his influence——? She had flattered, she had surrounded him with an atmosphere of adulation. She had loved so much his possessions and her realized ambitions that she had imbibed the theory that she had loved him. True, she had admired him—his impressive presence, his dom-

ineering habit of mind, his expensive culture, his discrimination in matters of art and music, the cringing attitude toward him of his employees, his humble friends, and now and then a man on his own plane, unable to sustain his individuality before that coercive influence. Bring tribute—bring tribute! In every relation of life that fiat went forth. And she had permitted herself to believe that her craven acquiescence in this demand was—love! And, doubtless, the tyrant, unabashed by the glaring improbability, had believed it too.

The phases of fashionable life are never so minimized as in the presence of some great and grave actuality of human experience—she looked back upon them now with a disgusted wonder and an averse contempt. The world for which she had longed in her quiet rural home, which had opened its doors so unexpectedly, so beatifically, to her trembling entrance, seemed to her now full of dull and commonplace people, all eagerly pursuing some sordid scheme of advancement, regardful of their fellows only to envy values which they do not share, to cringe before consequence and station which only belittle them, to pull down, if occasion permit, those who are on the up-grade, to alternately court and decry their superiors, and to revile and baffle the humble. And for a share in this world, this outlook, this atmosphere, she had bartered her happiness, had destroyed her identity, as nearly as she might, had achieved the lot of a lifelong victim to intolerable tyranny.

In all her beclouded spiritual sky there had glowed the radiance of one single star, one pure and genuine emotion, her maternal love, bought by

no price, asking naught, giving in an ecstasy of self-abnegation that made sacrifice a luxury and suffering a joy.

And now this light of her life was obscured by dense clouds, and who could say how and when it would emerge.

The change of place, the sense of escape acted in some sort as a respite, but there was possible no surcease of anguished solicitude. Her uncle began almost immediately the concoction of a letter to Mr. Floyd-Rosney, which should be a triumph of epistolary art to accomplish its ends. He desired to remonstrate against the enforced expatriation of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, to insist on the propriety of restoring her son to her care, and to condemn the cruelty of the separation, all expressed in such soft choice locutions as to give no offense to the gusty temper of her husband and to make no reflections on the justice of his conduct. He wished to take a tone of authority and seniority as being the nearest and eldest relative of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, and thus entitled to offer his views and advice in her behalf, yet to avoid seeming intrusive and guilty of interference between husband and wife.

As he wrote at his desk in the sitting-room, his intent grizzled head bent over the repeated drafts of this effort, Paula, passing in the hall without, catching a glimpse of his occupation, had space in her multifarious anguish for a sense of deep humiliation that this should be going forward in her interest. How she had flaunted the achievement of her great marriage in this her simple home, in the teeth of their misgivings, their covert reservations, their depreciation of her treatment of Randal Du-

cie. She had piqued herself on the fact that not many girls so placed, so far from the madding crowd, could have made such a ten-strike in the matrimonial game. Her standards were not theirs; her life was regulated on a plane which did not conform to their ideals, but as time went on they had ventured to hope for the best, and when Geoffrey Majoribanks had been asked occasionally if his niece had not made a very rich marriage he would add "and a very happy one." This he had believed, although in view of Floyd-Rosney's imperious temperament and the process of his wife's evident subjugation, it must seem that the wish had constrained his credulity. Now the illusion was dispelled, the bubble had burst, and it devolved upon him to patch up from its immaterial constituent elements some semblance of conjugal reconciliation and the possibility of a degree of happiness in the future.

He was a ready scribe, as were most men of his day, and had a neat gift of expression. But he called for help continually in this instance, now from his wife, and throwing ceremony to the winds, in view of the importance of the missive, once his hearty, resonant voice summoned the party most in interest, Paula herself.

"Our object is to get the child restored to your care and to compass a cessation of this insistence that you shall go abroad,—not to win in an argument. Now do you think this phrasing could offend Mr. Floyd-Rosney, or wound his feelings?"

Paula, standing tall, pale, listless, beside the desk, leaning on one hand among the litter of discarded papers of the voluminous epistle, looked down into his anxious, upturned face, beneath his tousled, griz-

zled hair, pitying the limitations of his perceptions.

"Any phrasing will offend Mr. Floyd-Rosney if he wishes to be offended," she replied languidly, "and he has no feelings to wound."

She went slowly out of the room, leaving him meditatively biting the handle of his pen.

The letter bade fair to become a permanent occupation. He worked at it late at night and all the forenoon of the next day, and when, at the two o'clock dinner, his wife suggested that he should take Paula out for a drive about the country,—she would be interested in seeing how little it had changed since she was a resident here—he shook his head doggedly over the big turkey that he was deftly carving.

"No,—no," he said, "I must get back to that—that document. You and one of the boys can take her to drive."

The "document" was duly finished at last and duly mailed. Then expectation held the household to fever heat. The return mail brought nothing; the next post was not more significant; nor the next; nor the next. A breathless suspense supervened.

One Monday morning Major Majoribanks came into the sitting-room with a sheaf of newspapers in his trembling hand, a ghastly white face and eyes of living fire. He could not speak; he could scarcely control his muscles sufficiently to open a journal and point with a shaking finger to a column with great headlines. He placed the newspaper in the hands of his wife, who was alone in the room, then he went softly to the door, closed it, and sank down in an armchair, gasping for breath. His wife, too, turned pale as she read, but her hand was steady.

Mr. Edward Floyd-Rosney, the paper recited, to the great amazement of the city, had brought suit against his wife for divorce. The allegations of the bill set forth that she had fled from her home with Randal Ducie, who was named as co-respondent, and the husband made oath that in seeking to intercept and reclaim her, following her to the station as soon as he discovered her absence, he had witnessed her departure in company with Randal Ducie just as the train moved out of the shed.

Major Majoribanks presently hirpled, for he could scarcely walk, across the room, and laid his finger on another column in a different portion of the paper, and treating of milder sensations.

"I didn't need this to prove that—that—a base lie—" his stiff lips enunciated with difficulty.

This paragraph treated of the current cotton interests, giving extracts from an address made by Randal Ducie in New Orleans at a banquet of an association interested in levee protection, on the evening and also at the hour when he was represented in Floyd-Rosney's bill as fleeing with his neighbor's wife in a city five hundred miles distant. He had made himself conspicuous as an advocate of certain methods of levee protection, and his views were both ardently upheld and rancorously contested even at the festive board. The occasion was thus less harmonious than such meetings should be, and the local papers had much "write-up" besides the menu and the toasts, in the views of various planters and several engineer officers, guests of the occasion, lending themselves to a spirited discussion of Randal Ducie's recommendations.

## CHAPTER XXI

COLONEL KENWYNTON, now at his home on his plantation on the bayou, also gazed with starting eyes and dumfounded amazement at the excerpt from the legal proceedings, within his own knowledge so palpably false. He read it aloud under the kerosene lamp to Hugh Treherne on the other side of the old-fashioned marble-topped center table.

"What do you think of that, sir?" and the Colonel gave the newspaper a resounding blow.

Treherne smiled significantly.

"I am impressed all the time, Colonel, with the insanity of the people outside the asylum in comparison with the patients under treatment."

"Good God, sir," cried the Colonel in great excitement, "this is a shotgun business, and Floyd-Rosney is the man of all others to brazen it out on a plea of the 'unwritten law.' He will shoot one or the other of the Duccies on sight, and they are as much alike as two black-eyed peas,—they really ought to wear wigs,—he is as likely to pot one as the other. And the poor lady! My heart bleeds for her. I must clear this matter up," concluded the all-powerful. "I will send a communication to the newspapers."

Now Colonel Kenwynton had, in his own opinion, the pen of a ready writer. It was not his habit to

mince phrases or to revise. He wrote a swift, legible hand, for he was a relic of an age when gentlemen prided themselves on an elegant penmanship, in the days when the typewriter was not. He had no sort of fear of offending Floyd-Rosney, nor care for wounding his feelings. He recited in great detail the facts of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's entrance into the Adelantado Hotel, her disclosure of her husband's desire that she should tour the Orient with the Hardingtons, who had already acquainted the writer that she was to be of their party, and her grief because of her separation from her child, who had been secretly removed from her home as a preparation for her departure. Now and then the Colonel cast his eyes upward for inspiration and waved his pen at arm's length.

"Not too much hot shot, Colonel," remonstrated Hugh Treherne, a little uneasy at these demonstrations.

"Attend to your own guns, sir," retorted the Colonel.

With no regard for the awkwardness of the incident, he stated that the poor lady, although the wife of a millionaire, had not command of ten dollars in the world with which to defray the expenses of her journey to the home of her youth, and to her uncle who stood in the relation of a father to her, for his advice and protection against being shipped out of the country.

"It is my firm belief," and the Colonel liked the words so well he read them aloud to his comrade, "that we do not live in Turkey, that the honored wives of our Southland do not occupy the position of inmates of a harem, and I could not regard Mrs.

Floyd-Rosney as the favorite of a sultan. Therefore it afforded Mr. Adrian Ducie and me great pleasure to advance the money for her tickets to the home of her uncle, Major Majoribanks, and to see her on the train." He explained, at great length, that the departure of the train was so imminent and immediate that Adrian Ducie bought tickets to the first station for himself and Colonel Kenwynton, in order that they might not be detained by any question at the gate, and, at the moment of boarding the cars, Mr. Floyd-Rosney, "hunting down the persecuted fugitive," had mistaken Adrian Ducie for his brother, Randal Ducie, who at this moment was in New Orleans, making an address to the Mississippi River Association, giving them the benefit of his very enlightened views, which the whole country would do well to study and adopt, thereby saving many thousands of dollars to the cotton planters of the jeopardized delta.

Restraining himself with difficulty from pursuing this attractive subject, Colonel Kenwynton explained that while Randal Ducie was an old acquaintance of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's, Adrian Ducie was a stranger to her, and had met her only on one previous occasion. The undersigned and Adrian Ducie had accompanied the poor lady so far as the first station, and taking farewell of her they had returned to town in the interurban electric. He furthermore informed the public that in view of some possible unforeseen emergency he had taken the liberty of pressing upon this poor lady, absolutely unprovided with money for her necessities, a twenty dollar bill, to be returned at her pleasure, and had since received a letter from her uncle, inclosing that sum, and thank-

ing him for his consideration. At the home of this uncle—the home of her girlhood—she was now domiciled with him and her aunt, who was formerly the charming Miss Azalia Thornton, whom many elder members of society would well remember.

The Colonel was enjoying himself famously, and now and again Hugh Treherne looked anxiously over the top of the newspaper at him as he tossed the multiplying pages across his left hand, and took a fresh sheet.

The Colonel, with keen gusto, then entered on the subject of Floyd-Rosney, whom he handled without gloves. There ought to be some adequate criminal procedure, he argued, for a man who had offered such an indignity to the wife of his bosom as this. If an equivalent insult could have been tendered to a man Mr. Floyd-Rosney would have been shot down in his tracks—or, at the least, have been made to pay roundly for his brutality. But the wife, whom he has sworn to love, honor, and cherish, is defenseless against his hasty, groundless conclusions. She can only meekly prove her innocence of a guilt that it is like the torments of hell-fire to name in connection with her. Colonel Kenwynton solemnly commended to our lawmakers the consideration of this subject of a penalty of unfounded marital charges. The converse of the proposition never occurred to him. In his philosophy the women were welcome to say what they liked about the men.

If, he maintained, the gentleman accompanying Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had been Randal Ducie instead of his brother, the circumstance would have signified naught with a lady of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's character, which the good people of this city would

uphold against her husband even backed by all his filthy lucre. But Randal Ducie was in New Orleans making an address on levee conditions, on which subject his brother Adrian was peculiarly uninformed, and it did seem to Colonel Kenwynton that almost any man would have learned more from sheer observation, even though he had been absent from the country for the past six years. He was now in Memphis, where, being singularly like his twin brother, he was mistaken for Randal Ducie, well known here, and his arrival thus chronicled in the papers. Adrian Ducie was not widely acquainted in Memphis, having spent the last six years in the south of France, where he was interested in silk manufacture.

If Mr. Floyd-Rosney's course, declared the Colonel, pursuing the subject, in forcing a ghastly round of pleasure on his wife, sighing for her absent child, was typical of his domestic methods, his wife was a martyr. When she would insist on having her child restored to her arms one could imagine his saying—"Go to, woman, where is your pug!" Colonel Kenwynton ardently hoped that the pressure of public opinion would force Mr. Floyd-Rosney to disregard no longer the holy claims of motherhood, and give back this child to the aching arms of his wife. The heart of every man that ever had a mother was fired in revolt against him, despite his wealth, that cannot buy sycophancy, and abject acquiescence and pusillanimous silence from us.

The Colonel admired the rolling periods of his production so much that he read aloud with relish the whole effort from the beginning.

"What do you think of it, Hugh?" he demanded.

"I think the paper won't publish it," said Hugh Treherne.

The paper, however, did publish it. The position of Floyd-Rosney in the affair, as the incontestable facts began to be elicited, took on so sorry an aspect that he was hardly in case to bring an action for libel, and the Colonel's letter was good for the sale of a double edition. People read it with raised eyebrows and deprecation, and several said the Colonel was a dangerous man and ought to have his hands tied behind him. But the plain truth, so plainly set forth, the old traditions which he had invoked, which they had all imbibed more or less, went far to reinstating Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's position, and to exhibit her husband's character in a most damaged and disastrous disparagement. He was advised by his counsel, who were disconcerted in the last extreme by being connected in so disreputable a proceeding, that the only course open to policy and prudence and the prospect of conserving any place in public esteem, was to retract absolutely and immediately, frankly confessing a mistake of identity, and to restore the child to the custody of his mother.

"Even that won't mend the matter," said Mr. Stacey—his face corrugated with lines unknown to his placid sharpness when he and his firm had no personal concern. He had nerves for his own interest, though not an altruistic quiver for his client.

"All the world thinks," he continued, "that you are as jealous as a Turk, and that will add a sensational interest to the Duciehurst suit, of a kind that I despise"—he actually looked pained—"when it is developed that your wife found and restored the

Ducie papers. I wish you had taken my advice; I wish you had taken my advice."

And Floyd-Rosney said never a word.

He had come to be more plastic to counsel than of yore, and in a few days thereafter the train made its infrequent stoppage at Ingleside, and deposited Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's favorite old colored servant and her little charge, who sturdily trudged through the grove of great trees—vast, indeed, to his eyes—and suddenly appeared in the hall before his mother, with a tale of wonder relating to the bears, which he believed might be skulking about among the giant oaks.

## CHAPTER XXII

FLOYD-ROSNEY had expected that the restoration of the child to the mother would effect an immediate reconciliation with his wife. Therefore, he attained a serenity, a renewal of self-confidence which he had not enjoyed since the humiliating *contretemps* at Union Station. In the dismissal of his bill for divorce—the *retraxit* craftily worded and expressing with a dignity that might have seemed impossible under the circumstances his contrition for the hasty and offensive assumptions of his mistake, a sweeping recantation of all his charges and a complete endorsement of his wife's actions in every relation of life,—he considered he had offered her an ample apology for his conduct and had held out a very alluring olive branch. He had a relish, too, of the surprise he had planned, partly to avoid a more personal method to court her forgiveness, in sending the child in charge of her favorite servant, old Aunt Dorothy, to alight unheralded from the train at Ingleside. He imagined her delight and gratitude and awaited, in smiling anticipation, altogether devoid of anxiety, her ebullient letter, brimming with thanks and endearments, and taking the blame, as she was wont to do in their differences, in that she had so misunderstood him and precipitated this series of perverse happenings that had exposed him to such cruel public misconstruction.

But this letter did not come.

He began to frown when the mail was brought in, and to sort the missives with a hasty touch for something that he did not find. The servants, always on the alert to observe, and agog about the successive phases of the scandal which they had witnessed at such close quarters, collogued over the fact that he laid the rest of the mail aside unopened for hours, while he sat with a clouded brow and a reflective, unnoting eye in glum silence, unsolaced even by a cigar. It was not good to speak to him at these crises, and the house was as still as a tomb.

Floyd-Rosney's ascendancy in life had been so great, so fostered by his many worldly advantages, that he could make no compact with denial, defeat. He had not yet reached the point where he could write to his wife and beg her forgiveness, or even reproach her with her agency in the disasters that had whelmed their domestic life in this unseemly publicity. He developed an ingenuity in devising reasons for her silence. She was too proud; he had let her have her head too long. She would not write —she would not verbally admit that she condoned his odious charges, which he often declared he had a right to make, if he were to believe the testimony of his eyes, witnessing her flight with her old lover, Randal Ducie, as he was convinced, boarding the train together. She would simply return unheralded, unexplained,—and that was best! He had himself inaugurated this method in restoring the child without a word. It was a subject that could not be discussed between them, with all its sensitive nerves, with its open wounds quivering with anguished tremors. No! She would come to her home, her hearth-

stone, her husband, as she had every right to do, even paying all tribute to her pride, to her sense of insulted delicacy. He saw to it that the papers containing the text of his full retraction and explanation of the circumstances were mailed to her, and then adjusted himself anew to waiting and anticipation.

He had been spared in the details of his life all the torments of suspense which harass men less fortunately placed. It may be doubted if ever before he had had cause to anticipate and await an event, and hope, and be deferred and denied. He could scarcely brook the delay. He began to fear that he should be obliged to write and summon her home. Once he even thought of going in person to escort her back, and but that he shrank from meeting her eye, all unprepared as she would be, he would have followed little Ned to Ingleside. Something might be said on the impulse of the moment to widen the breach. He could not depend upon her—he could not depend upon himself. She knew the state of his mind, he argued. Those papers, most astutely, more delicately than any words of his might compass, had depicted his whole mental status. Doubtless, after a seemly diplomatic interval she would return. The sooner the better, he felt in eager impatience. He had hardly known how dearly he loved her, he declared to himself, interpreting his restiveness under the suffocations of suspense and anxiety as symptoms of his revived affection. He became so sure of this happy solution of the whole cruel imbroglio that he acted upon it as if he had credible assurance of the fact. He caused certain minor changes, which she had desired, to be made in the house—changes

to which he had no objection, but he had never taken thought to gratify her preference. He ordered the suite of rooms that she had occupied to be thoroughly overhauled in such a fever of haste that the domestic force expected to see the lady of the mansion installed in her realm before a readjustment was possible. At last everything was complete and exquisite, and Floyd-Rosney, patrolling the apartments with a keen and critical eye, could find no fault to challenge his minute and censorious observation. A new lady's maid was engaged, of more skill and pretensions than the functionary he had driven from his service, and had already entered upon her duties in the rearrangement of her mistress's wardrobe, and the chauffeur took heedful thought of the railroad timetables, that he might not be out of the way when the limousine should be ordered to meet Mrs. Floyd-Rosney at Union Station.

Under these circumstances the filing of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's bill for divorce and alimony fell like a bombshell upon the defenseless head of her husband. It was a genuine and fierce demonstration, evidently calculated to take advantage of every point that might contribute to the eventuation of a decree. The allegations of cruelty and tyranny, of which there were many instances that Floyd-Rosney, in his marital autocracy had long ago forgotten, including the crafty blow which he had given her under the cloak of the child in her arms, were supplemented and illustrated by the secret removal of her child from her care, and the determination to ship her out of the country against her will. Thus she had

been constrained in defense of her personal liberty to flee to the home of her uncle, her nearest relative, although she was obliged to borrow the money for the railroad fare from a mere stranger whom she had met only once before. Notwithstanding the fact that her husband was several times a millionaire, he permitted her no command of money, her fine clothes and jewels and equipages being accorded merely to decorate the appurtenances of his wealth and ostentation. She recounted the indignity she had causelessly suffered in the allegations of his bill for divorce, all baseless and unproved as was evidenced by their complete retraction under oath in the precipitate dismissal of the bill. Her petition concluded by praying for an absolute divorce with alimony and the custody of the child.

This document was not filed without many misgivings on the part of Major Majoribanks and of horrified protest from his wife. Ingleside was remote from modern progress and improvements, and such advantages as might accrue from successfully prosecuting a suit for divorce won but scant consideration there. The worthy couple were firm in their own conviction that marriage should not be considered a temporary connection. It was, to their minds, a lifelong and holy joining together, and should not be put asunder. Mrs. Majoribanks made some remarks so very old-fashioned as almost to excite Paula's laughter, despite the seriousness of the subject. It was a wife's duty to put up with her husband's foibles, to overlook little unkindnesses; the two should learn to bear and forbear in their mutual imperfections. Had she ever remonstrated

gently, with wifely lovingness, with Mr. Floyd-Rosney's harshness?

"I didn't dare," said Paula. And the mere phrase was an instance in point.

A woman's craft in reading hearts is a subtle endowment. Mrs. Majoribanks had not kept step with the onward march of the world, but she struck a note that vibrated more in accord with Paula's temperament when she said:

"It is often a hardship in point of worldly estimation to be a divorced woman."

She looked cautiously at Paula over her spectacles, for in the old days no one had been more a respecter of the opinions of smart people than her husband's niece.

"Oh, that isn't the case any more," said Paula lightly, with a little fleering laugh, "it is quite fashionable now to have a divorce decree."

"You may depend upon it," Mrs. Majoribanks said in private to her husband, "Paula is reckoning on winning back Randal Ducie! And, to my mind, that is the worst feature of the whole horrible affair."

Major Majoribanks did not altogether concur in his wife's views of the possible efficacy of gentle suasion on Mr. Floyd-Rosney's irascibilities. Perhaps he knew more of the indurated heart of that type of man. The Major had been greatly impressed by the attempt upon his niece's personal liberty, as he interpreted the insistence on the Oriental tour and, although he welcomed little Ned with an enthusiasm that might have befitted a grandfather, he was apprehensive concerning the child's return as an overture of reconciliation. He felt

his responsibility in the situation very acutely. He did not favor the plan of seeking merely a legal separation and maintenance, which his wife advocated, because it was not conclusive; it would be regarded by Floyd-Rosney as temporary and would render Paula liable to pressure to recur to their previous status. He did not consider his niece safe with her arrogant and arbitrary husband, as the attempt to enforce a tour alone with casual acquaintances to the Orient amply proved. The extreme measure of secretly removing the child from her companionship and care as means of subjugation might be repeated when circumstances of public opinion did not coerce his restoration. Mrs. Majoribanks had not a more squeamish distaste for divorce than her husband, nor did she entertain a deeper reverence for the sacredness of the bonds of matrimony. But he reflected with a sigh of relief that it was not his duty to seek to impose his own views on his niece. Paula was permitted by law to judge and act for herself, and she had had much experience which had aided in determining her course. He could not bring himself to urge her to condone the insupportable allegations in the bill of divorce which Floyd-Rosney had filed and allowed to be made public, and to trust herself and the child once more in his clutches. She had now the wind of public favor in her sails. Her husband had committed himself so openly and so irretrievably that it was probable that the custody of the child would be awarded to her in view of his tender years. Later, when time should have somewhat repaired the tatters of Floyd-Rosney's status in the estimation of the world, when the inevitable influence and importance of so rich a man

should begin to make themselves felt anew, it might be more difficult for her to contend against him. If ever she could hope to free herself from him and his tyrannies, and his unimaginable machinations in the future, now was the opportunity and this the cause of complaint. He might not again give her so palpable and undeniable an occasion of insupportable affront. Major Majoribanks, even in the seclusion of Ingleside, took note of the penniless estate of the wife of the millionaire as she fled from her richly appointed home, and gave due weight to the fact that the decree would assure her future comfort by requiring alimony in proportion to the husband's means. There was no obligation on him to deprive her of her due maintenance and protection by the urgency of his advice, although his wife goaded him with her strict interpretations of his duty, and his brow clouded whenever she mentioned her belief of the influence of the expectation of winning back Randal Ducie upon Paula's determination.

Paula had thus the half-hearted support of her relatives in her proceedings, and she was grateful even for this, saying to herself that with their limitations she could hardly have expected more. She was eager and hopeful, and, to Mrs. Majoribanks's displeasure, not more sensitive to the mention of the proceedings than if they had involved a transaction concerning cotton or corn. The three Majoribanks boys were excited on the possibility of an attempt to kidnap little Edward, since the filing of the bill, and they kept him, in alternation, under close and strict surveillance night and day.

"It would be impossible to spirit him away from

Ingleside," they bluffly contended, and to their mother's great though unexpressed displeasure their father did not rebuke their bluster.

"We all talk of getting the decree," she said in connubial privacy, "as if it were a diploma."

He nodded ruefully. But he was the more progressive of the two.

And in this feeble and sorry wise the influence of modern civilization began to impinge on the primitive convictions and traditions of Ingleside.

## CHAPTER XXIII

ADRIAN DUCIE was affronted beyond measure by the unseemly notoriety given to his part in the Floyd-Rosney incident, in the subsequent publications emanating from various sources. The serious menace, however, that the circumstances held for Randal moderated for a time his indignation. He thought it not improbable that Floyd-Rosney would shoot Randal Ducie on sight, and he greatly deprecated the fact that his brother was chronicled by the New Orleans papers as having quitted that city, on his way to Memphis, returning by boat.

"Why didn't the fellow stay where he was until matters should have developed more acceptably?" Adrian fumed in mingled disgust and apprehension. His anxiety was somewhat assuaged in the meantime when Colonel Kenwynton's letter appeared, and more especially when Floyd-Rosney withdrew his petition for divorce—a definite confession of his clumsy mistake. Still in Adrian's opinion latent fires slumbered under the volcanic crust, as this sudden eruption had proved. This city was no place for the bone of contention between husband and wife. The season for the preparations for cotton planting was already well advanced. Assuredly it was seemly and desirable for Randal to repair to his plantation and supervise the

operations of his manager and his laborers. Adrian found his own stay in the city harassing to his exacerbated nerves. The questioning stare of men whom he passed on the streets, who looked as if they expected salutation, in default of which surmised that this was the twin brother, hero of the Floyd-Rosney *esclandre*, annoyed him by its constant repetition, and gave his face a repellent reserve which the countenance of the gentle and genial Randal had never known. A dozen times he was more intimately assailed, "Hey, Ran, old man, how goes it?" with perhaps a quizzical leer, or an eager hopefulness that some discussion of the reigning sensation of the day might not be too intrusive. When the stranger was enlightened, not abruptly, however, for Adrian was cautious to refrain from alienating Randal's friends, the comments on the wonderful likeness implied an accession of interest in the significant incident in Union Station, and, doubtless, many a surmise as to what had betided heretofore to arouse the lion in the husband's breast. Obviously, both the brothers for every reason should be removed from the public eye till the story was stale; but, although Adrian felt this keenly, he himself could not get away in view of the interests of his firm in an important silk deal with a large concern desiring to treat directly with the representative of the manufacturers.

He had never cared so little to see his brother as one day when the door of his bedroom in the hotel unceremoniously opened and Randal entered. He had deprecated the effect of all this publicity on the most sensitive emotions of that high-strung and spirited nature. He was proud, too, and winced

from the realization that all the world should be canvassing the fact of Randal's rejection by Mrs. Floyd-Rosney in her girlhood days. She had treated him cruelly, and had dashed her plighted troth, his love, his happiness to the ground with not a moment's compunction, for a marriage of splendor and wealth—"and," said Adrian grimly to himself, "for it she has got all that was coming to her."

He felt for Randal. His heart burned within him.

"Why, who is this that I see here?" cried Randal gaily, as he entered. "Not myself in a mirror surely, for I never looked half so glum in all my life."

There was a hearty handclasp, and a sort of facetious fraternal hug, after the fashion of men who humorously disguise a deeper emotion, and they were presently seated in great amity before the glowing fire.

"This is imported Oriental tobacco," said Adrian, handing his brother a cigar.

"Imported from where—the corner drugstore?" demanded Randal, laughing, his face illumined by the flicker of the lighted match.

"Genuine Ladikieh," protested Adrian.

"It's like carrying coals to Newcastle to pay duty on tobacco in America."

"I didn't say I paid any duty, did I?"

"Oh, you haven't the grit to smuggle anything through, and if you had you would have brought enough to generously divvy up with me."

He sent off a fragrant puff, stretched out luxuriously in his armchair, and turned his clear eyes upon his brother.

There was a momentary silence.

"I read the report of your address in the papers. It was very able and convincing."

"I'd care more for your compliments if you understood the subject," declared Randal cavalierly. Then, roguishly, "Is that *all* you have read about me in the papers lately?"

Adrian stared, dumfounded. And he had so wincingly deprecated the effect of this limelight of publicity upon the shrinking heart of the rejected lover.

"I think it very hard you should be subjected to this," he began sympathetically.

"Who—I? Why,—I was never so pleased in my life!"

"Why—what do you mean, Randal? It is a very serious matter; it might have had a life-and-death significance."

"Serious enough for Floyd-Rosney," Randal laughed bluffly. "Did ever a fellow so befool himself, and call all the world to witness! Of course, I deprecate the publicity for the lady, but everybody understands the situation. It does not injure her position in the least. That is the kind of husband she wanted—and she has got him."

Adrian silently smoked a few moments.

"I never was so affronted in my life," he said.

Once more Randal laughed. "I was simply enchanted," he declared.

"Honestly, Randal, I don't understand you," said Adrian, holding his cigar delicately in his fingers.

"Oh, I am very simple, quite transparent, in fact."

Adrian shook his head, restoring his cigar to his lips. "Don't make you out, old man."

"Because you have never been told by a lady to

take foot in hand, and toddle! Discarded—rejected—despised! Therefore”—with a strong puff—“you can’t know what a keen joy it is to realize that you are still important enough to be the cause of domestic discord between husband and wife, when you haven’t seen the lady but once in five years, and then in his presence, besides, being five hundred miles away, meekly babbling about levee protection.”

Adrian stared. “And you like that?”

“Like it? It goes to the cockles of my heart.”

“Randal, I should never have thought it of you,” said Adrian rebukingly.

“Because, kid, I am older than you and know many things that you haven’t learned. I got a little bit the start of you in life and I have kept ahead of you ever since,” Randal declared whimsically.

“I can’t comprehend how you like to be mixed up in that miserable misunderstanding.”

“Why, it flatters me to death. She couldn’t put me out of her heart, although she could and did lacerate terribly my heart. Floyd-Rosney is jealous of my very existence. But for that he would have inferred no more from seeing me, as he thought, assisting her to board the train than any incidental acquaintance tendering that courtesy. He is not disturbed that *you* boarded the train with her.”

“You are jealous of Floyd-Rosney,” said Adrian abruptly.

Randal thrust his cigar between his lips and spoke indistinctly with this obstruction. “Not I,” he laughed. “Not under these circumstances.”

Adrian was frowning anxiously. The two faces, so alike in feature, were curiously dissimilar at the

moment, the one so genially confiding, the expression of the other, alert, expectant, with a grave prophetic rebuke.

"Look here, Randal," Adrian said seriously, "you perturb me very much. You speak actually as if you are still—still sentimentally interested in this woman—another man's wife—because you discover—"

"That both she and her husband are sentimentally interested in me; ha! ha! ha!" Randal interrupted.

"I could never imagine such a thing,—it perturbs me," Adrian persisted seriously.

"It perturbs me, too," declared Randal quizzically, "to have you gadding about in my likeness, escorting other men's wives,—the gay Lothario that you are!—and getting *me* into the papers, the public prints. Oh, fie, fie."

"And she *is* another man's wife," remonstrated Adrian.

"She won't be long if she has a spark of spirit left," declared Randal boldly. "She will bring suit for divorce herself."

"But I doubt if she can get it," said Adrian in dismay.

The difference of mood made itself manifest in the tones of their voices—Adrian's crisp, imperative, even tinctured with sternness, Randal's careless, musical, drawling.

"Oh, she can get it fast enough. I should think from what I observed of his manner to her she could prove enough instances of cruelty and tyranny to melt almost any trial judge."

Adrian reflected silently upon the episodes on the

*Cherokee Rose*, but kept his own counsel, while the smoke curled softly above the duplicate heads.

"When I saw them together," observed Randal, "he impressed me as being a veritable despot, and in a queer way, too. I can't understand his satisfaction in it. He arrogated the largest liberty to criticize her views and actions, as if his dictum were the fiat of last resort. I tell you now, kid, criticism and cavil in themselves are incompatible with love. No man can deprecate and adore at the same time the same object. When he thinks the feet of his idol are of clay the whole structure might as well come down at once. He seemed to have a certain perversity, and this is a connubial foible I have seen in better men, too; a tendency to contradict her in small, immaterial matters for the sheer pleasure of contrariety, I suppose,—to oppose her, to balk her, merely because he could with impunity. I imagine he has enjoyed a long lease of this impunity because his perversity has attained such unusual proportions, and her plunges of opposition had the style of sudden revolt rather than the practiced habit of contention. She has lived a life of repression and submission with him. Her identity is pretty much annihilated. The Paula of her earlier days is nearly all disappeared."

For a few moments Adrian said nothing in response to this keen analysis of character, which corresponded so well to his longer opportunity of observation, but sat silently eyeing the fire in serious thought.

Suddenly he broke out with impassioned eagerness.

"Randal, you are my own twin brother——"

"I am obliged to admit it," interpolated Randal flippantly.

"—my other self. The tie that binds us seems to me closer than with other brothers. We came into the world together; we have lived hand in hand almost all our lives; we even look alike."

"And make a precious good job of it too," declared Randal gaily.

"We feel alike; we believe alike; we have been educated in the same traditions; we respect the sanctities of the old fireside teachings; we have not strayed after strange gods."

Randal had taken his cigar from his lips and in his half recumbent position was gazing keenly at his brother.

"What are you coming to, kid?"

"Just this—you are not looking forward to this divorce in the hope—the expectation of marrying this woman? Are you? Tell me."

Randal's eyes flashed. "What do you take me for?" he said angrily between his set teeth. "She could never again be anything to me,—not even if Floyd-Rosney were at the bottom of the Mississippi River."

"Oh, how this relieves my mind," cried Adrian.

"You may set it at rest,—for I could never again love that woman."

"I know that I have no right to interfere or even to question—but you always appreciate my motives, Randal. You are the best fellow in the world."

"I always thought so," said Randal, smoking hard.

"I believe she will expect it," suggested Adrian, still with some anxiety.

"She will be grievously disappointed, then,—and turn about is fair play."

"I want you to guard against any soft surprise," said Adrian. "She seemed so sure of you. She said you were the only friend she had in the world. She came to the *Adelantado Hotel* to find you—that you should lend her ten dollars for the railroad fare to Ingleside!"

"The liberal Floyd-Rosney!"

"I want you to look out for her. She is a designing woman. She is heartily tired of her bargain, and with reason, and she wants to pick up the happiness she threw away five years ago——"

"With me and poverty."

"She has enjoyed an artful combination of real poverty and fictitious splendor. I want you to be frank with me, Randal, and confide in me, and——"

"Take that paw off my arm."

"—and," continued Adrian, removing his hand, "not make an outsider of your own, only twin brother."

"Heaven protect me from two twin brothers like unto this fellow," laughed Randal. "Make yourself easy, Adrian; when I am finally led to the altar I shall countenance an innovation in the marriage ceremony—the groom shall be given away by his own only twin brother."

"She broached the matter herself when she had an opportunity to speak aside to me on the *Cherokee Rose*," said Adrian, his reminiscent eyes on the fire.

"What? Divorce and remarriage?"

"Oh, no—no. The course she had pursued with you."

Randal's eyes glowed with sudden fire; his face flushed deeply red.

"That was very unhandsome of her," he said curtly, "and by your leave it was very derogatory to both you and me for you to consent to discuss it."

"Why should *I* decline to discuss it when she introduced the subject,—as if I felt that *you* were humiliated in the matter or had anything to regret?"

"It would seem that neither of you were hampered with any delicacy of sentiment or sensitiveness."

"She spoke to me of a gift of yours that she had failed to return. She wished me to convey it to you. But I referred her to the registered mail or the express."

"That was polite, at all events."

"I told her that the relations between my brother and myself were peculiarly tender, and that I would not allow her to come between us. And, with that, I bowed myself away."

Randal's eyes gloomed on the fire, with many an unwelcome thought of an old and shattered romance. But when he spoke, it was of the present.

"Adrian, I am sorry I was so short with you. Of course I know you could not openly avoid the topic forced upon you in that way. I am sure, too, that you did not fail to take full cognizance of my dignity, as well as your own. I wouldn't hurt your feelings for a million dollars."

"Well, you did it," retorted Adrian, "and nobody that I know of has offered you so much as fifty cents. It was a gratuitous piece of meanness on your part. And you can take that paw off me," glancing

down with affected repugnance at Randal's caressing hand laid on his sleeve.

"Well," said Randal, with a long sigh, "she closed the incident herself. She gave me the trinket in her husband's presence—and you can imagine Floyd-Rosney was all eyes."

"She placed it on the table among the Ducie jewels the previous night," said Adrian; "and, as I was occupied in reading the papers, I asked her pointedly to take charge of it. And she looked most awfully cheap as she repossessed herself of it."

"Adrian, you really have a heart of stone in this connection," smiled Randal, "and after she had been chiefly instrumental in restoring to us the Duciehurst papers and jewels!"

"What else could she do—commit a felony and keep them? I certainly entertain no fantastic magnanimity on that score."

Randal laughed, but the solicitous Adrian fancied this phase of the subject might develop a menace to the future, and hastened to change the topic. "I wish you would come with me and confer with our lawyers to-day, Randal," he suggested. "It is better to have both principals in interest present at any important consultation. I have an engagement with them at three," drawing out his watch for a hasty glance.

"Agreed," said Randal, springing up alertly. "Where's your clothes-brush?—but no, I suppose there is not a speck of the dust of travel on me, for, when I tipped the man on the boat, he practically frayed all the nap off my clothes to show his gratitude. I am presentable, eh?"

He stood for a moment before the long mirror,

then broke forth whimsically in affected alarm. "Adrian, who is this in the mirror, you or I? I am all mixed up. I can't tell us apart. What are we going to do about it?" he continued, as if in great agitation, while Adrian, with a leisurely smile—for he had often taken part in this *gambade*, a favorite bit of fooling since their infancy—looked about for his hat.

"Let's go downstairs and get somebody to pick us out," suggested Randal, "for, really, I don't want to be you, Adrian. You are too solemn and priggish; why, this must be I, for, if it were you, you would have said 'piggish.' You are so dearly fraternal. Don't come near me, I don't want to get mixed up again. I begin to know myself. This is I."

But, notwithstanding this threatened peril of proximity, they walked down the street together, arm in arm, to the office of the counsel, followed by many a startled glance perceiving the wonderful resemblance, and sometimes a passing stranger of an uncultured grade came to a full halt in surprise and curiosity.

There were many consultations with the legal advisers in the days that ensued, which Randal Ducie found very irksome, accustomed as he was to an active outdoor life and a less labyrinthine species of thought than appertains to the purlieus of the law. Unexpected details continually developed concerning the interests involved. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's bill for divorce was filed in the meantime, and because it had a personal interest paramount to its importance in the Duciehurst case it brought up again the matter of taking her deposition in these

proceedings which had been pretermitted by reason of affairs of greater magnitude.

The decision was reached on a day when to Randal's relief he was able to dub facetiously the counsel "the peripatetic philosophers" by reason of a journey which they thought it necessary to take in the company of their clients and which he found much more tolerable than the duress of their offices and their long indoor prelections. The four men boarded a packet leaving the city at five o'clock; it being deemed advisable that the lawyers should make a personal examination of the locality and the hiding place of the DUCIE papers and other valuables, before conferring with the Mississippi counsel retained in the case. The question of summoning Mrs. Floyd-Rosney was discussed as they sat on the hurricane deck in the approaching dusk between the glitter of the evening sky, all of a clear pink and gold, and the lustrous sheen of the expanse of the river, reflecting a delicate amber and rose. The search-light apparatus was not illumined and looked in the uncertain half twilight as if it might be some defensive piece of artillery of the mortar type, mounted on the hurricane deck. The great smoke-stacks, towering high into the air, had already swinging between them the green and red chimney lamps, required by law, but as yet day reigned and all the brilliancy of the evening bespoke a protest against the coming night.

Adrian DUCIE doubted the availability of summoning Mrs. Floyd-Rosney in their interest. The proof could inferentially be made without her, by those who saw her deliver the box and witnessed its opening and contents. Besides, here were the

papers to speak for themselves. But Randal Ducie urged the deposition. It would seem conscious not to call her. Why should she not give her testimony. It was disrespectful to imply that Mrs. Floyd-Rosney would be reluctant to do this.

"Mr. Floyd-Rosney is a mighty touchy man," suggested the junior counsel. This practitioner was about forty years of age, thin, wiry, eager, even fidgetty. He had a trick of passing his hand rapidly over his prematurely bald head, of playing with his fob chain, of twisting a pencil, or his gloves, or his eyeglasses—these last also, perhaps, a prematurely acquired treasure. Apparently he had burned a great deal of midnight oil to good purpose, for he was admittedly an exceedingly able lawyer, destined to rise very high in his profession.

His associate in the case was in striking contrast, in many respects, to Mr. Guinnell. He was a portly man, with a big head, and a big frame, and a big brain. It was his foible,—one of them, perhaps,—in moments of deep thought to close his eyes; it may have been in order to commune the more closely and clearly with the immanent legal entity within; it may have been more definitely to concentrate his ideas; it may have been to shut out the sight of Mr. Guinnell's swiftly revolving pencil or eyeglasses; whatever his reason, the habit had a most unnerving effect on clients in consultation, suggesting the idea that their affairs—always of vital importance to the parties in interest—were of slight consequence to their adviser and of soporific effect. Both gentlemen were serious-minded, and, which is more rare in their profession, abysmally devoid of a sense of humor.

"The filing of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's bill for divorce and alimony complicates the situation," continued Mr. Guinnell, "although I have thought since the Union Station incident," he hesitated slightly, glancing toward Randal,—"you will excuse me for mentioning it in professional confidence."

"Certainly; I often mention it myself as a mere layman," said Randal, debonairly.

"I have thought that Mr. Floyd-Rosney will make a stiff fight on the hard letter of the law,—*à l'outrance*, in fact,—with no contemplation of such concessions as would otherwise present themselves to litigants, looking to compromise, settlement of antagonistic interest by equitable adjustment. In the present development of his domestic affairs he will find it quite intolerable for his wife to give testimony in the interest of Mr. Randal Ducie and his brother. Mr. Floyd-Rosney will wince from it."

"It is a good thing that something can make him wince," declared Randal hardily. "A stout cowhide is evidently what he needs."

"I hope, Mr. Ducie," said Mr. Harvey, the senior counsel in alarm and grave rebuke, "that you will not take that tone in testifying. All the circumstances in the case render the situation unusual and perilous, and we want to do and say nothing that will place either you or your brother in personal danger from Mr. Floyd-Rosney."

"The only cause for wonder is that your brother was not shot down at Union Station, being mistaken for you," Mr. Guinnell added the weight of his opinion to his partner's remonstrance. "If Floyd-Rosney had chanced to wear a revolver Adrian Ducie would not be here to-day to tell the tale."

"Count on me; I am yours to command," declared Randal, lightly. "I am a very lamb, when necessary, and you may lead me through the case with a blue ribbon and a ring in my nose. I'll eat out of any man's hand!"

The ponderous senior counsel looked at him soberly. The junior twirled and twirled his fob-chain.

"We wish to conduct this case to the best advantage," said Mr. Harvey, "and leave no stone unturned that can contribute to success. But we wish to be conservative—we must keep that intention before us, to be *conservative*, and give Floyd-Rosney no possible opportunity for outbreak at our expense, either in regard to the interests of the case or the personal safety of our clients."

"I will order my walk and conversation as if on eggs," declared Randal, with a wary look.

"I do not apprehend any unseemly measures or conduct on the part of the opposing counsel," continued Mr. Harvey. "They are gentlemen of high standing. But Mr. Floyd-Rosney has a most unruly and unreasoning temper and he has placed himself at a deplorable public disadvantage in this matter, which, be sure, he does not ascribe to himself. We will go slowly and safely—coming necessarily into contention with him. But we shall take Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's deposition by all means."

And thus the matter was settled.

On the third day the boat made the Duciehurst landing, and some hours were spent in exploring the ruins of the mansion. Later the party separated, the lawyers repairing to the inland town of Caxton for a conference with the local legal firm who would

prosecute the interests of the case in Mississippi, and the two Duccies making a prearranged excursion to a plantation which Randal had leased at some distance higher up the river. As the residence on this plantation was comfortable and in good repair he had quitted his quarters at the hotel in Caxton and had taken up his abode here. It had been a wrench to him to relinquish the operations on the Ducie estate; but he was advised that his claim to rightful possession might be jeopardized by consenting to hold under Floyd-Rosney, which course, indeed, he had never contemplated. As the two, mounted on the staid farm horses, rode through the fields and speculated on their possibilities, Randal would often pause in the turn-rows—the cotton of last year a withered stubble—in systematic lines, with here and there a flocculent “dog-tail,” as the latest wisp of the staple is called, flaunting in the chill spring breeze, and would descant on the superior values of the Duciehurst lands compared to these, illustrating sometimes by the fresh furrows near at hand, showing the humus of the soil, for the plows were already running. Now and again he turned his eager, hopeful eyes on his brother as he declared, “This time next year, old man, I shall have the force busy getting ready to bed up land for cotton at Duciehurst.” Or “When the estates of our fathers are restored to us I shall live in formality at our ancestral mansion, and if you dare go back to France I shall revenge myself by marrying somebody.”

“Anybody in view?”

“Apprehensive, again? Well, to set your mind at rest, I was thinking, pictorially merely, how state-

ly Hilda Dean looked walking down the grand staircase with her head up. How beautifully it is poised on her shoulders."

"She is truly beautiful," Adrian said heartily, "and during all that trip down the river I was impressed with her lovely character, and her sterling qualities of mind and heart. Her beauty, great as it is, really is belittled by the graces of her nature. Pray Heaven your visions of Hildegarde as your chatelaine at Duciehurst may materialize."

"One more year,—one more year of this toilsome probation, and then," Randal's face was illumined as if the word radiated light, "Duciehurst!"

Adrian, looking over the river which was now well in view from the fields, began to speculate on the approach of a skiff heading down stream, and running in to the bank. "I wonder if that is the boat that your manager was to send for me for my trip to Berridge's?"

For, although the terror of the fierce pursuit of the riverside harpies inaugurated by Colonel Kenwynton had swept the others in flight from the country, not a foothold of suspicion had been found against Berridge and his son. It was known that Captain Treherne had spent the night at their amphibian home, and had gone thence to his conference with Colonel Kenwynton on the sand-bar; so much he himself had stated, but he declared positively that neither of the Berridges was with the miscreants who had waylaid him on his return and conveyed him bound to Duciehurst. It was beyond his knowledge, indeed, that this choice twain had later joined his captors at the mansion. Their strength of nerve, however, failed them when they were noti-

fied that the DUCIE counsel desired an interview with them on this visit to the vicinity to ascertain if their testimony would be at all pertinent in the matters preliminary to the discovery of the documents. Even their non-appearance this afternoon did not excite unfavorable comment. It was supposed that in the depths of their illiteracy they had not understood the nature of the communication, if indeed they had received it, and Adrian DUCIE promised the counsel to see old Berridge or his son personally and explain the matter in order to have them present in Caxton the following day when the lawyers should be in conference.

"Oh, I will go instead," cried Randal; "I really ought not to let you go on this errand, for," with a quizzical smile, "you are 'company,' you know."

"Not very formal 'company.' You ought to see to the placing of that new boiler in the gin-house,—and I have nothing to do. Yes," continued Adrian, still regarding the approach of the skiff, "that is your man Job, and he can take this horse back to the stable."

He dismounted hastily and throwing the reins to Randal, he ran lightly up the slope of the levee. He paused on the summit to wave his hand and call out cheerily, "Ta, ta—see you later," and then he threw himself in the skiff, which was dancing on the floods close below, the boatman holding it by the painter as he stood on the exterior slope of the embankment.

The river was at flood height and running with tremendous force. But for the aid of the current Adrian's strength plying the oars would have made scant speed. It was only a short time before he

sighted the little riverside shanty which no longer showed its stilts, but sat on the water as flush with the surface as a swimming duck. Adrian was able from his seat between the rowlocks to knock on the closed door without rising. There was no response for a few minutes, although the building was obviously inhabited, the sluggish smoke coiling up from the stove-pipe into this dull day of late winter or early spring, whichever season might be credited with its surly disaffection. A child's voice within suddenly babbled forth, and but for this Adrian fancied a feint of absence might have been attempted. With a slight motion of the oars he kept the skiff in place at the entrance, and at length the door slowly opened and the frowsy, copper-tinted hair and freckled face of Jessy Jane was thrust forth.

She was one of that type of woman to whom without any approach to moral delinquency a handsome man is always an object of supreme twittering interest, however remote of station and indifferent of temperament; however crusty or contemptuous. That he should obviously concern himself in no wise with her existence did not in any degree minimize the intensity of her personal absorption in him. Her face, sullen and lowering, took on a bland and mollifying expression, and with a fancied recognition of the rower she broke forth with a high, ecstatic chirp:

“Why, Mr. Ran, I never knowed 'twas you hyar!” though she had never spoken to Randal Ducie, and knew him only by sight.

“This is not Mr. Randal Ducie, but his brother,”

said Adrian, and as she stared silently at him, noting the wonderful resemblance, he continued:

"I want to speak to Joshua Berridge," he consulted a paper in his hand. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"My dad-in-law," she explained, suavely; "but he ain't at home just now, though"—with a facetious smile, "'twon't be long 'fore he comes—most supper time, ye know. Won't ye kem in an' wait?"

Ducie declined this invitation and sat meditatively eyeing the waste of waters, for the river was now at its full scope, barring inundation, and stretched in great majesty to a bank scarcely visible on the farther shore.

"I ain't sure, but what ye mought find him over on the old *Che'okee Rose*," she said, speculatively, for Ducie was very comely and she had a special impulse to be polite to so worthy an object of courtesy.

"Is the old steamboat there yet?" he asked, looking over his shoulder at the murky swirls of the swift current. There was now no sign of the sand-bar on which the ill-fated craft had stranded. The foaming waves raced past and submerged its whole extent. None might know where it lay. A deep-water craft, drawing many feet, might have unwittingly plied above its expanse. Only a fraction of the superstructure of the steamboat—the pilot-house and texas, and the upper part of the cabin, showed above the waste of waters to distinguish the spot where the steamer had run aground and the pitiless storm had flayed out all its future utility.

"The wreckers have been down time and again," she went on with a note of apology. "They tuk off

all the vallybles before the water riz,—the kyarpets, an' funnicher, an' mirrors, an' sech—even the big chimbleys. The water got the rest, but wunst in a while ef us pore folks wants somethin' that be lef' fur lost—like some henges, or somthin' we jest tries to supply ourse'fs ez bes' we kin."

Adrian was still silently looking at the wreck that he had such cause to remember, with all that had since come and gone.

"Well, I reckon Dad is over there now, hunting fur them henges," said the woman, speculatively. "Leastwise," holding her palm above her eyes, "'pears like I kin see a boat on the tother side, a-bobbin at the e-end of a painter!"

Adrian moved with a sudden resolution. The oars smote the water, and with curt and formal thanks for the information, he began to row strongly across the current that despite his best endeavors carried him continually down and down the river, and required him to shape his course diagonally athwart the stream to counteract its impetus.

The woman stood for a time aimlessly watching him, as the rhythmic oars plied, and the skiff, shadowless this dull day, kept on its way. At last she turned within and shut the door.

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE effect on Floyd-Rosney of his wife's legal proceedings was deep and radical. His counsel constantly noted in him a sort of stunned surprise, as if contemplating some fantastic revulsion of the natural course of events. He had fashioned this result as definitely as if he had planned its every detail, yet he regarded it with an affronted amazement that he should be called upon to experience events so untoward. He had a disposition to belittle the efficiency of the demonstration. He perceived with a snort of rage and contempt the seriousness with which his counsel regarded it and declared violently that she could never get a decree.

"You mean to defend the suit, then?" Mr. Stacey asked, very cool, and pallid, and dispassionate.

"What else?" thundered Floyd-Rosney, the veins in his forehead blue and swollen, his face scarlet, his hands quivering.

"I can't see upon what grounds, in view of the terms of *retraxit*."

"You dictated the terms of that precious performance," declared Floyd-Rosney, with vindictive pleasure in shifting the blame.

But Mr. Stacey easily eluded the burden.

"Under your specific instructions as to the facts to which you made affidavit," he said, coldly.

It was perhaps evidence how Floyd-Rosney was

beginning to acquire a modicum of prudence under the fierce tuition of circumstance that he avoided a breach with his lawyers. He heartily cursed them in his heart, recollecting the many large fees they had received at his hands, minimizing altogether the arduous work and professional learning that had earned them. He broke off the consultation, which he postponed to a future day, and left them with a stunned realization that these men, whose capacity and experience he had so often tested, were of opinion that he had no defense against the preposterous suit of his wife, that she would receive her decree and be awarded the custody of the child and ample alimony which it would be adjudged he should pay.

He set his teeth, gritting them hard when he remembered how these lawyers had sought to induce him to defer filing his bill, to mitigate his allegations, to investigate the circumstances more closely. Their judgment had been justified in every particular, and though showing no triumph—Mr. Stacey was too completely a legal machine for such manifestation—he gave attestation of his human composition by the cold distaste, which he could not disguise, for the subsequent developments.

“Damned if *he* is not ashamed to be concerned with *me*,” Floyd-Rosney said to himself, fairly staggered by the preposterous climax of the situation.

He began to have a great desire to get out of the country, to be quit of all the sights and associations of his recent life, but he had pressed the preparations for the Duciehurst suit, and his absence now as the date of the trial approached would have the aspect of a pusillanimous retreat, specially obnox-

ious to him in view of the fact that the Duccies were his opponents. The overthrow of his plans and expectations of his wife's return to him and the rehabilitation of their life together was like the demonstration of some great earthquake or cataclysmal disaster; it had destroyed all the symmetry and purpose of his life; his outlook was as upon a blank desert of despair, an "abomination of desolation." That human heart of his, despite its overlay of selfish aims and turbulent pride, had depths seldom stirred of genuine feeling; he yearned for sympathy; he poignantly lacked the touch of his absent child's hand; the adoring look in the limpid infantile eyes; he felt at every turn the loss of the incense of adulation that his wife had been wont to burn before him. It had made sweet the atmosphere of his life, and until it ceased he had never known how dependent upon it his very respiration had grown to be—it was as the breath of his life. While he sat in his solitary library, brooding and silent, reviewing in his enforced leisure and loneliness the successive steps by which the destruction of his domestic happiness had been compassed, his brow darkened and grew fierce as he fixed the date of its inception to the meeting with Adrian Ducie on the *Cherokee Rose*, and the discovery that his wife could subtly distinguish between these facsimile faces of the two brothers the lineaments of her former lover. Even now his logic strove to reassert itself. Of course, the man's face was intimately familiar to her; there must be tricks of expression, the lift of an eyebrow, the curl of a lip, methods of enunciation peculiar to one and alien to the other, distinctive enough to a keen and habituated observer. But, alack! this was not all,

offensive as were its suggestions to his pride of monopoly. He said to himself that from the moment of the presentation of this vivid reminder of her old lover's face was inaugurated the recurrence of the Ducie influence in her life. Here began that strange, covert revolt against him and all his theories and plans, which had grown inch by inch till it possessed her. She had never been the same, and he—fool that he was—through his magnanimity in withdrawing the allegations of his bill, had furnished her with the certainty of gaining a decree in her counter suit for divorce, of securing an ample fortune in the belittling name of alimony, and the opportunity of marrying and endowing with this wealth, derived from him, the penniless Randal Ducie, whose baleful influence had destroyed for him all that made life worth living.

Floyd-Rosney had never been an intemperate man, but in this grim seclusion he began to drink heavily. He had piqued himself upon his delicate taste, his acumen as a judge of fine wines, but the Chambertin and Château Yquem remained untouched during his hasty dinners, while the brandy decanter had taken up a permanent position on the library table, and he had ordered up from the cellar an old and rich whisky that had been laid down by his father before he was born, and that he had, so far as the butler knew, never yet tasted.

It was difficult for the lurking magnate, in his sullen seclusion, to face the eyes of his own domestic staff; he could not bring himself to confront the questioning, speculative gaze of the streets, the club, the driving park. Even such *rencontres* as chanced when he went to consult his counsel, whom, but for

very shame he would have summoned to him, he found an ordeal. He had grown poignantly sensitive and keenly perceptive as well, and was discriminating in minute points of facial expression and gradations of manner. He could differentiate embarrassment, commiseration,—and how pity stung him!—reprobation, and oftenest of all, a sort of covert relish, an elation, that with any personal relation would have meant triumph. "They are nearly as well pleased as if I were broken," he would say cynically to himself. But there was no breach of courtesy, no abatement of the deep respect usually tendered to a magnate and millionaire. He was keenly alive to detect the insignia of a diminution of consideration, but his little world salaamed as heretofore, for he was by no means broken, not even if he should have to pay heavy alimony, and lose Duciehurst into the bargain. The experience of these encounters, however, weighed heavily on his nerves, now all a-quiver and jangling with the effects of his deep potations.

His home was odious to him; his covert speculations as to the deductions of the servants, whom ordinarily he would have disregarded as mere worms of the earth, afflicted him. He was keenly conscious of his humiliated position in their eyes, cognizant as he knew them to be of his expectation of his wife's return, and the elaborate preparations he had made and personally supervised for her reception. He found a greater degree of privacy and comfort on his yacht, which he ordered up from New Orleans, where she had been lying for a month past, refitted and revictualed, awaiting his summons. He steamed down the river to the Gulf

on one occasion, but finding himself out of touch with his counsel in the Duciehurst case, and realizing that some final decision must be reached as to his course in the divorce suit, he confined his wanderings to idly cruising up and down the river, stopping at prearranged points for mail or telegrams.

In this resource he experienced a surcease of the harassments that infested his life on shore. His skipper knew little and cared less of land-lubber interests—as maritime an animal as a crab. He had, indeed, with a brightening eye and a ready courtesy, asked, when Floyd-Rosney came over the side of the *Aglaia*, if the madam was not going to favor the ship's company with her presence. Being answered shortly in the negative he heartily protested his regret.

"The best sailor she is of any lady I ever saw," he declared, and added that if they were to do some deep-sea stunts they need not consult the barometer for weather signs. She cared no more for weather than a stormy petrel. He always looked on the madam's presence as a good omen, he said; he had a bit of the blarney and a bit of poesy in his composition, his ancestry hailing from the Emerald Isle.

"She has brought no good luck to her husband," Floyd-Rosney reflected, grimly.

It was grateful to him, however, to perceive that the man knew naught of his recent discomfitures and humiliation; of very meager consequence such an opinion would have been ordinarily, but the evident ignorance of the skipper enabled him to hold his head higher. The skipper read nothing in the newspapers but the shipping news, and but for the change

in Floyd-Rosney's bibulous habit he might never have been the wiser.

"He's drinking like a fish," he said in surprise to the second officer. "That's new with him."

"Seems to me," responded the subordinate, meditatively, "I heard something when we was in port in Boloxi about him and the madam havin' had some sort o' row."

"I hate to trust him with the brand new dinky skiff," said the skipper. "He ain't a practiced hand; I seen him run her nose up on a drift log lying on the levee with a shock that might have started every seam in her."

But the yacht, with all that appertained to it, was Floyd-Rosney's property, and the skipper could only enjoy his fears for the proper care of its appurtenances.

For Floyd-Rosney had contracted the habit of scouting about in the skiff, while the yacht swung at anchor, awaiting his pleasure. The solitude was soothing to his exacerbated nerves. He could, indeed, be alone, for he took the oars himself, and as he was a strong, athletic man the exercise was doubtless beneficial and tonic. The passing of the congestion of commerce from the great river to the railroads had brought the stream to an almost primitive loneliness. Thus he would often row for hours, seeing not a human being, not the smoke of a riverside habitation, not a craft of any of the multifarious species once wont to ply the waters of this great inland sea. The descriptive epithet was merited by its aspect at this stage of the water. Bank-full, it stretched as far as the eye could reach. Only persons familiar with the riparian contours could de-

tect in a ruffled line on the horizon the presence of a growth of cottonwood on the swampy Arkansas shore.

One of these days, when he was thus loitering about, the sky was dull and clouded; the river was dark, and reflected its mood. The tender green of spring was keen almost with the effect of glitter on the bank, and he noted how high the water stood against the levees of plantations, here and there, menacing overflow. When a packet chanced to pass he bent low to his oars, avoiding possible recognition from any passenger on the guards or officer on deck, but he uncharacteristically exchanged greetings with a shanty boat, now and again propelled down the stream with big sweeps; none of the humble amphibians of the cabins had ever heard, he was sure, of the great Floyd-Rosney. Sometimes he called out a question, courteously answered, or with a response of chaff, roughly gay. Once, being doubtful of the locality, he paused on his oars to ask information of an ancient darkey, who was paddling in a dug-out along the margin of the river.

"You are going to have an overflow hereabout," added Floyd-Rosney.

The old darkey, nothing loath, joined in the dismal foreboding, keeping his craft stationary while he lent himself to the joys of conversation with so aristocratic a gentleman.

"Dat's so, Boss; we'se gwine under, shore, ef de ribber don't quit dis foolishness."

"Whose plantation is that beyond the point, where the water is standing against the levee?"

"Dat, sah, is de Mountjoy place, but hit's leased dis year ter Mr. Ran Ducie. I reckon mebbe you is

'quainted wid him. Mighty fine man, Mr. Ran is, an' nobody so well liked in the neighborhood."

Without another word Floyd-Rosney bent to his oars. Was there no escape from this ill-omened association of ideas?

The old darkey, checked in the exploitation of his old-time manners and balked in the opportunity of polite conversation, gazed in amazed discomfiture after Floyd-Rosney's skiff, as it sped swiftly down the river, then resumed his progress, gruff and lowering, ejaculating in affront:

"White folks is cur'ous, shore; ain't got no manners, nor no raisin', nor no p'liteness, nohow."

Floyd-Rosney's equipoise had been greatly shaken by the strain upon his nerves and mental forces, this depletion of his powers of resistance supplemented by constant and inordinate drinking, contrary to his usual custom. Thus he had become susceptible to even the slightest strain on his self-control. He noticed that with the renewal of the mental turmoils that he had sought to elude—conjured up by the chance mention of the man's name that meant so much to him in many ways—his stroke grew erratic and uncertain; once one of the oars was almost wrenched from his grasp by a swirl of the current. He was well in mid-stream, in deep water, and he realized that should he lose his capacity to handle the little craft he would be in immediate danger of capsizing and drowning, for his strength in swimming could never enable him to breast that tumultuous tide at flood height. The yacht was out of sight, lying at anchor in the bight of a bend, that cut him off from all chance of being observed and rescued by the skipper. He summoned his presence

of mind and let the boat drift for a few moments while he took from his pocket a brandy flask, and drank deeply from its undiluted contents. The potent elixir rallied his forces—steadied his nerves. With its artificial stimulus his hand was once more firm, his eye bright and sure. But its stimulus was not lasting, as he knew, and fearing an incapacity to handle the boat in this swirling waste of waters he directed his course toward an island, as it seemed, thinking that thence he would signal the *Aglaia* and wait for her to steam up and take him off. There he would be in full view from the yacht.

As he neared his destination he perceived—as he had not hitherto, because of the potency of the brandy—that the island of his beclouded mirage was the wreck of the *Cherokee Rose*, still aground on the sand-bar, although waters swirled around her, and fish swam through her cabin doors and the slime and ooze of the river had befouled the erstwhile dapper whiteness of her guards and saloon walls. He lay on his oars for a space, regarding with meditative eyes the ruin, analogous, it seemed to the far-reaching ruin that had its inception here and that had trailed him so ruthlessly many a day. In his dreary idleness he was sensible of a species of languid curiosity as to the extent of the ravages of water and decay in comparatively so short a time. Only a few months ago, in the past October, he had been aboard the packet, when trig and sound, and immaculately white and fully equipped, she had run aground on this treacherous bar, where her bones were destined to rot. He wondered that the wreckers had left so much, unless, indeed, their operations were frustrated by the sudden impending

rise of the waters. The craft lay listed to one side, the hull evidently smashed like an egg-shell by the furious onslaught of the storm, but a part of the superstructure—the *texas* and the pilot-house—was still above water, though canted queerly askew.

Floyd-Rosney rowed briskly to the stair that formerly served to ascend to the hurricane deck, the skiff running up flush with the flight. He sprang out—first trying the integrity of the wood with a cautious foot, and tied the painter firmly to one of the posts that supported the hurricane deck, leaving the boat leaping on the ripples, as if seeking to break away from some ponderous creature of its own kind that would fain drag it down into the hopeless devastations of a lair in the depths.

With a deep sigh Floyd-Rosney slowly ascended the few steps of the stair above the current, and stood looking drearily down upon the structure wherein were lived those scenes so momentous in his fate so short a time ago. As he walked along the canted floor, his white cap in his hand, his head bared to the breeze, he glanced now and again through the shattered cabin lights down into the saloon, seeing there the water continuously swirling in the melancholy spaces, once full of radiance and cheer and genial company. All the doors of the staterooms had been removed, both those opening on the guards and the inner ones, of which the panels were decorated with mirrors and which gave upon the saloon. A vague jingle caught his attention; a fragment of an electrolier still clung to the ceiling and sometimes, shaken by the ripples, its glass pendants sent forth a shrill, disconsolate vibration, like a note of funereal keening. Suddenly from

amidst that weird desolation of shifting waters a face stared up at him. It was unmistakable. He saw it distinctly. But when he looked again it was gone.

Floyd-Rosney was trembling from head to foot. He had turned ghastly pale. But for the wall of the *texas* against which he staggered he might have fallen. He did not question the reality of his impression. It was as definite as the light of day,—a face strangely familiar, yet sinister, seen in the murky depths. He wondered wildly if it could be the drowned face of some victim of the wreck, or if this were now impossible, some curious explorer such as himself, meeting here more serious mystery than any he had sought. The next moment he broke into a harsh laugh of scorn. It was his own reflection! At the end of the saloon, where the craft lay highest on the bar, one of the mirrored doors, shattered doubtless in careless handling in process of removal, had been left as useless. In this fragment he had seen his face for one moment, and then the ripples played over the glass and the semblance was gone, returning now again. But Floyd-Rosney had no mind to watch these weird, illusory antics. It was horrible to him to see his face mirrored anew, distorted in those foul depths where he had been once well and happy and full of exuberant life and hope, with wife and child and fortune, every desire of his heart gratified, both hands full and running over.

As he turned away he was surprised to note how the shock had shaken his composure, his nerves. He was loath to quit his posture against the wall of the *texas* that had supported him. His long, intent

gaze into the swirl of the waters had induced a tendency to vertigo, and he looked about for something that might serve for a seat. The pilot-house was but two or three steps above, and there were seats built into the wall, he remembered.

He made shift to clamber up the short flight. The door was still on its hinges, but so defaced and splintered as to be not worth removing, and so askew as to be difficult to open. With one strong effort, for Floyd-Rosney was a powerful man, he burst it ajar, although it swung back to its previous position, implying a like difficulty in opening it again.

He sat down on the farther side, on the bare bench, the upholstery having disappeared, and waited to regain his composure. Once more he had recourse to the brandy flask, now nearly empty. Once more the fires streamed through nerve and fiber, revivifying his every impulse. He felt that he was himself again, as he gazed through the blank spaces where the glass was wont to be, at the vast expanse of the great river, now a glittering sheen under a sudden cast of the sun. Beautiful chromatic suggestions were mirrored back from the sky; a stretch of illuminated lilac, an ethereal hue touched the vivid green of the opposite bank. A play of rose and gold was in the westward ripples, and one bar, athwart the tawny reach, of crude, intense vermillion betokened a cloud of scarlet, harbinger of sunset in the offing. He could see the little house on stilts to the left hand, now like a boat on the water. In the enforced stay here, when aground on the sand-bar, he had time to familiarize himself with even unvalued elements of the land-

scape. To the right was a bayou, the current running with great force down its broad channel, as wide as an ordinary river, and on the other side of the bight of the bend, lay the *Aglaia*. He wondered if the *Cherokee Rose* was an object of the scrutiny of the skipper's binacle. Floyd-Rosney thought that he should be on the watch for his employer's return, which was doubtless the fact, as he had no other duties in hand.

Floyd-Rosney was still eyeing the craft, meditating how best to signal his wish to be taken back to the *Aglaia*, when a sudden sound caught his attention—a sound of swift steps. They came rapidly along the hurricane deck, where he himself had found footing, mounted the short stair to the texas, and the next moment the door of the pilot-house was burst ajar and the face and form of Adrian Ducie appeared at the entrance.

Floyd-Rosney staggered to his feet.

"What does this mean, sir?" he cried, thickly, the veins of his forehead swollen stiff and blue, his face scarlet, his eyes flashing fire.

The newcomer seemed surprised beyond measure. He stared at Floyd-Rosney as if doubting his senses and could not collect his thoughts or summon words until Floyd-Rosney blustered forth:

"Why this intrusion! Leave this place instantly!"

"It is no intrusion, and I will go at my own good pleasure. I came here thinking to find a man with whom I have business."

"Well, you have found him. A business that should have been settled between us long ago!" He advanced a step, and he had his right hand in his pocket.

"I don't know what you mean."

"You'll find out, as sure as your name is Randal Ducie," hissed Floyd-Rosney.

"That's exactly what it is not. I am Adrian Ducie."

"You can't play that game with me. I know your cursed face well enough. I will mark it now, so that there will never be any more mistakes between you."

Adrian had thought he had a pistol, but it was a knife—a large clasp knife which he had opened with difficulty because of the strength of its spring as he fumbled with it in his pocket. He thrust violently at Ducie's face, who only avoided the blow by suddenly springing aside; the blade struck the door with such force as to shiver off a fragment of the wood.

Taken at this disadvantage it was impossible for Adrian to retreat in the precarious footing of the wreck and useless to call for help. He could only defend himself with his bare hands.

"I call you to observe, Mr. Floyd-Rosney," he exclaimed, "that I am unarmed!"

"So much the better!" cried Floyd-Rosney, striking furiously with the knife at the face he hated with such rancor.

But this time Adrian caught at the other man's arm to deflect the blow and there ensued a fierce struggle for the possession of the knife, the only weapon between them. While Floyd-Rosney was the heavier and the stronger of the combatants, Adrian was the more active and the quicker of resource. He had almost wrested the knife from Floyd-Rosney's grasp; in seeking to close the blade the sharp edge was brought down on Floyd-Rosney's

hand, and the blood spurted out. The next moment he had regained it and he rushed at his adversary's face—the point held high. Pushing him back with one hand against his breast Adrian once more deflected his aim from his eyes and face, but the point struck lower with the full force of Floyd-Rosney's terrific lunge, piercing the throat and severing the jugular vein.

## CHAPTER XXV

As his antagonist fell heavily to the floor, the force of the impact shaking the crazy, ruinous super-structure of the boat with a sinister menace, Floyd-Rosney's first emotion was the stirring of the impulse of self-preservation. Not one moment was wasted in indecision. He stepped deftly across the prostrate body, wrenched the door open with a violent effort and with satisfaction heard the dislocated spring slam it noisily behind him. There the corpse would lie indefinitely, unless, indeed, the man whom Ducie had professed to seek should come to keep an appointment; probably he had already been here, and had gone, for the mustering splendors of the evening sky betokened how the hours wore on to sunset. As Floyd-Rosney took his way with a swift, sure step to the stair where his boat still struggled at the end of the painter attached to the post, he noted that Ducie had followed his example and secured his own skiff in like manner. A sudden monition of precaution occurred to Floyd-Rosney even in his precipitation, and in loosing his own craft he set the other adrift, reflecting that to leave it here was to advertise the presence of its owner aboard the *Cherokee Rose*; the current, sweeping as if impelled by some tremendous artificial force as of steam or electricity, set strongly toward the shore, and the boat, swiftly gliding on the ripples, would

ultimately ground itself on the bank, affording evidence that Ducie had landed. As without an instant's hesitation he busied himself in putting his plan into execution he did not think once of the powerful lenses of the binocle of the skipper, at watch for his return on the bow of the beautiful *Aglaia*, lying there in the bend of the river, not two miles away, like a swan on the water, between the radiant evening sky, and the irradiated stream, reflecting her white breast as she floated, a vision suspended in soft splendors.

He had a momentary doubt of the wisdom of his course, as he took up his oars, and the possibility of this observation occurred to him. Then he endeavored to reassure himself. It was the only practicable procedure, he argued. He took the chance of being unobserved, while otherwise the boat, swinging at the stairway, would unavoidably excite curiosity and allure investigation. Still, he would have preferred to have had that possibility in mind, before taking incriminating action,—to have had his course a matter of choice instead of making the best of it.

From this moment circumstances seemed contorted and difficult of adjustment. He had not noticed in his absorption that the cut inflicted upon him from his own knife was bleeding profusely, and beginning to sting and smart violently. He must have unwittingly scattered drops of blood all along the deck and stairs as he came. It was a marvel, he reflected, still optimistic in instinctive self-defense, that none had fallen on his suit of white flannel. He held the wounded hand in the water, hoping to stanch the flow, but the red drops welled forth with

an impetuous gush, as of a burst of tears. The cut was not deep, but it was clear and clean, for the blade had been as sharp as a razor. With a little time it would dry in the cicatrix and close the wound. His back toward the *Aglaia*, he felt sufficiently free of espionage to tear his linen handkerchief to shreds, using his teeth to start the rent, for with that hand dripping not only with blood, but with bloodguiltiness, he dared not search his pockets for his knife. He bound up the wound, carefully, his plans forming in his mind with all minute detail as he adjusted the bandages. He would loiter about the river, he said to himself, till the bleeding ceased, which must be in half an hour's time, and the hand would then not be liable to notice. With his splendid physical condition any wound would be swift in healing. It would be close on nightfall, he meditated, and this was all the better, for he would board the yacht under cover of the darkness and give orders to drop down the river to the Gulf, thence to the open sea—his ultimate destination being some port beyond the reach of extradition, for he had lately tested his hold on public favor, and was resolved to risk nothing on its uncertain tenure. He could perfect his plans when in mid-ocean. Meantime, the present claimed all his faculties.

With the fast plying oars and the strong sweep of the current the skiff shot along with a speed that suggested a winning shell in a 'varsity race. When he approached within ear-shot of the *Aglaia* he hailed the skipper, who promptly responded from the deck, and still at a considerable distance, well in mid-channel, Floyd-Rosney shouted out his intentions to proceed in the skiff a few miles further, as

he wished to investigate the old Duciehurst mansion, and ordered the *Aglaia* to drop down at six o'clock and pick him up there.

As his excitement and the fever of his fury began to subside, the flow of blood slackened perceptibly. He noticed that the saturated portion of the bandage was growing stiff and dry; that the blood no longer continued to spread on the fabric. He would throw it away presently and wash his hands clear of the traces in the river.

He looked up at the massive walls of Duciehurst with a deep rancor as he approached the old mansion. The braided currents, making diagonally across the river, were carrying him toward it as if he were borne thither by no will of his own, and indeed this was in some sort true.

He loathed to see it again. He wished he had never seen it. Yet in the same instant he upbraided his attitude of mind as folly. What man of business instincts, he argued, would revolt against a great and substantial accession to his fortune, coming to him in regular course of law, because it was coveted by its former owners, ousted forty years before. He felt hard hit by untoward fate. All had been against him, from the beginning of this accursed imbroglio. He had done what he had thought right and proper,—what any sane and just man would endorse—and he had lost wife, child, and heavily in estate, and was possibly destined to exile for life,—if—if that ghastly witness on the stranded steamer should take up its testimony against him. But no! it was silenced forever! It could not even protect the man whom Ducie had expected to meet should that unlucky wight persist

in keeping his appointment, finding more than he bargained for, Floyd-Rosney said grimly.

The boat was running cleverly in to his destination. The landing was under water already, and the skiff glided over its location with never a sign suggesting its submergence. The old levee was indicated in barely a long ripple, washing continually above its summit, and this, too, the skiff skimmed, undulating merely to the tossing of the waters about the obstruction. The relative height of the ground on which the deserted mansion stood alone protected it from inundation, although as yet the disaster of overflow had nowhere fallen upon the land. But evidently the water would soon be within the fine old rooms, and Floyd-Rosney, looking with the eye of a wealthy as well as thrifty proprietor upon the scene, not only willing but able to protect, felt with a surly sigh of frustration that but for the impending lawsuit he would have built a stanch levee to reclaim the old ruin, even though there was a serviceable embankment protecting the lands in the rear.

The large arrogance of the massive cornice of the main building, the wide spread of the wings on either side, appealed to his taste of a justified magnificence. This structure was erected in the days of princelings who had the opulence to sustain its pretensions, and of his acquaintance he knew no man but himself who could afford the waste of money on its restoration. There was something appealing to an esthetic sense in the forwardness of the neglected vegetation about the glassless goggle-eyed ruin. In the magnolias on either side of the wings he caught sight of the white glint of blooms, so early though it was! the pink wands of the almond blos-

soms waved here and there in the breeze. The grass of the terraces was freshly springing. Vines draped the broken pedestals that had once upheld stone vases, and on the façade of the tall structure the sun crept up and up as suavely benign, as loath to leave as in the days when its splendors dominated the Mississippi, the "show place" of all the river.

Floyd-Rosney walked slowly along the broad pavement and up the long flight of steps to the wide doorless portal. Within shadows lurked, and memories—how bitter! He hesitated to go in—the influence of the place was like the thrall of a fate. He wished again he had never seen it. But he could hear, so definitely the water transmitted the sound, the engines of the *Aglaia* getting up steam, and he was conscious of the scrutiny of the skipper's powerful lenses.

Through all the vacant vastness swept the fresh breath of the river, so close at hand. The light from the sinking sun, broadly aslant, fell through the gaping windows and lay athwart the rooms in immaterial bands of burnished gold. The illusion of motion was continuous on the grand staircase where the motes danced in ethereal, hazy illumination. The contrasting dun-gray shadows imparted a depth and richness to the flare of ruddy gold, reddening dreamily as the day slowly tended to its close. All was silence, absolute silence. As he wandered aimlessly from room to room, his step loud in the quietude, the delicate scent of a white jessamine, early abloom, bringing its vernal tribute of incense to the forlorn old ruin year after year, despite half a century of neglect, thrilled his senses and smote some chord of softer feeling. A senti-

ment of self-justification rose in his breast. How was it that all had gone with him so strangely awry! Wherein had he erred? He had but exerted his prerogative to order the affairs of his family according to his best judgment in its interest, as any man might and should do, and—behold, this tumult of tortures was unloosed upon him. His wife had utilized the opportunity as a pretext to flee to Randal Ducie, and but for this day's work the deserted and divorced would have been fleeced by the courts to finance the new matrimonial venture. He had done right, he said, thrusting his white cap back from his heated brow. He had done well.

It had not been his intention to kill an unarmed man; the fatality of the blow had been an accident, but it was irrevocable, and it behooved him to look to the future. No one but the skipper of the *Aglaia* could have known of his entrance upon the derelict, and if he had chanced to observe it, a word in his employee's ear, that he had discovered the body there—murdered probably—and did not wish to be called as witness would be sufficient for the present; the skipper would have forgotten the whole incident before he had entered the first day's run at sea in the log of the *Aglaia*. There was no reason to connect him with the tragedy except that the two were on the river the same day. He had retracted, and exonerated, and handsomely eaten all manner of humble pie, and it was to be supposed that relations had been established as friendly as could exist between rival claimants of an estate now to be adjudicated by the courts.

He looked down at his hand. The wound that had so perversely bled showed only pallid lips, but

no sign of red. He could not remember if he had thoroughly wiped the gory knife and began apprehensively to search his pockets. Not here—not there. He grew ghastly pale. His breath came quick in suffocating gasps as he realized the truth. He had failed to repossess himself of the knife at that supreme moment of tragedy. He had an illuminating recollection, as if he beheld the scene anew, that the blade had caught on some strong ligament or cartilage in the man's throat and as the victim swayed and fell heavily he had not sought to secure it.

"Fool! Fool!" the empty building rang with the sound, and a score of frantic echoes shouted opprobrium upon him. He clasped his quivering hands above his head and sought to command his thoughts. He had been too drunk at the time to realize the fact, but the knife was a witness which would indubitably fix the crime upon him. Like all his personal accessories it was the handsomest thing of the kind that could be bought, and on the silver plate on the handle was engraved, according to his wont, his monogram. He started violently toward the hall. He must go back,—but he could never row the distance, exhausted, as he was, against the current. He would have the *Aglaia* to steam up on some pretext, and in company with the skipper they would discover the body, when unperceived he could repossess himself of the knife. He was terrified at the prospect of the attempt. He felt himself already in toils. He tossed his hands above his head and wrung them wildly. A hoarse cry of agony burst from his lips, suddenly dying in his throat, for—was that an echo in the resounding vacancy? A strange

sound, a great pervasive sound was filling all the air, as if the old house quavered, and groaned, and cried out in long endured anguish. There was a rush upon the staircase; he saw through the open doors of the drawing-rooms shadowy, flitting figures descending in crowds as if the ancient ghosts that had found harbor here were fleeing their refuge.

Nay, only coils on coils of dust. As he rushed forth into the hall he perceived at the end of the long perspective the great Mississippi River, as in some strange dislocation of the angle of vision, reaching—illuminated and splendid—to the flaunting evening sky.

And from the Mississippi River the lenses of the steam yacht *Aglaia*, focused on the old mansion of Duciehurst, saw it at one moment still and silent, majestic even, in its melancholy ruin, the sun lingering on its massive cornice and columnated portico. The next it slid as softly from vision as an immaterial mirage. The caving bank had gone down into the unimaginable depths of the river, carrying on its floods a thousand acres of disintegrating land and the turbulent waters of the liberated Mississippi were flowing deep over the cotton fields of Duciehurst plantation, two miles inland.

In the widespread commotion of the flood it was fortunate for the *Aglaia*, even though so far up stream—distant in the bight of the bend—that steam was already up in the boilers. Forging up the river, against the current, at her maximum speed, the yacht in the seething turmoil found no safe anchorage till near the bar where the derelict lay. Here she swung round and the officers sought to inaugurate measures to recover if it were possible the body

of Floyd-Rosney, who had indubitably perished in the submergence of the mansion. The whole region was aroused and aghast at the magnitude of the disaster. From the deck of the yacht were visible hurrying groups as the population pressed toward the ill-fated scene. The skipper's megaphone was in constant requisition as being an eye-witness of the calamity he alone could give authentic information. Randal Ducie, hastening down to his levee, was met on the summit by the information that his ancestral estate had ceased to exist, swept from the face of the earth as completely as if it had never been. Its restoration had long been the object nearest his heart, its sequestration in alien possession was the hardship of his life. But he showed scant emotion. Some subtle, inexplicable premonition of catastrophe infinitely heart-rending annulled the sense of loss.

"Where's my brother?" he demanded irrelevantly, and despite the remonstrances of the bystanders he threw himself into a skiff at the landing and pulled out on the tossing, turbulent tide. As the rage of the river subsided the search was joined by others, and a wild rumor of some disaster to Adrian Ducie quickly pervaded the vicinity. The finding of his rowboat on the Arkansas shore did not prove his landing, according to Floyd-Rosney's forecast, for the craft was caught in a tangle of saw-grass in a marshy swamp where footing was impracticable. The old negro to whom Floyd-Rosney had spoken in the afternoon was now returning from his errand down the river, which was gray with a slowly gathering mist, and melancholy with a cast of the silent and pallid moon. He hove near the little fleet of rowboats that roved the shadows and

asked a question concerning the appearance of the missing man, with whom he thought it possible he had had some conversation an hour or so ago.

"He looks like me," said Randal Ducie, throwing his face into high relief with an electric flashlight, and turning with poignant hope toward the boatman.

"Oh, no, sah! No, sah!" disconsolately admitted the old darkey, blinking in the glare. "Nebber saw two folks more onsimilar. Mr. Ran Ducie, I knowed you, Sah, from way back. Knowed yer daddy. Dis man looked like he thunk I war de wum o' de yearth, an' de yearth war built fur him, though I never p'sumed ter talk ter him. 'Twar him fust p'sumed ter talk ter me. He war dressed beautified, too, with white flannel suit, an' a white cap, an' handsome ter kill."

"Floyd-Rosney," Randal muttered through his set teeth. "And where did he go?"

"Ter de ole *Cher'kee Rose*, sah," the negro pointed at the derelict, lying on the bar, visible amidst the shadows thronging the river in the ghostly gleams of the moon that was wont to patrol the deck, and seek out the dark recesses of the cabin where the rise and subsidence of the water registered its fluctuations, and to look through the windows of the pilot-house where the steersman at the wheel once took his bearings.

It was a stupendous moment in a man's life when Randal Ducie stood in the shattered old pilot-house and looked down into his own dead face, as it were, ghastly pale and silent, under the moon's desolate light. The tie between the brothers had been more than the love of women, and the heart of the whole

countryside bled for Randal's grief. The extraordinary resemblance of the two, their fraternal devotion, their exile from the home of their fathers, and its wrongful detention in the possession of others, the destruction of the property by the caving bank, the greatest disaster the country had known for a half century, when its restoration to its rightful heirs seemed imminent, all appealed with tender commiseration to the heart of the world, albeit not easily touched, and a flood of condolence poured in unregarded upon Randal where he sat in his solitary home with bowed head and bated pulses, scarcely living himself, admitting no business, seeing no friend, opening no letter.

The knife that Floyd-Rosney had left piercing the dead man's throat had fixed the crime upon him, together with the testimony at the inquest of the old negro boatman, who had seen him take his way to the derelict, and that of the skipper who had watched him through the binocle of the *Aglaia* descend the steps, unloose both the boats that swung on the tide, secured to a post, and set one adrift while he rowed the other, the appurtenance of the *Aglaia*.

It was well, Randal felt, taking in these proceedings the only interest he could scourge his mind to entertain, that he was not called upon to prosecute on circumstantial evidence some forlorn water rat, or some friendless negro for the millionaire's crime, as doubtless Floyd-Rosney had contemplated. Though the death of the gentle and genial Adrian went unavenged, save by the heavy hand of Heaven itself, it wrought no calamity to others, except in his incomparable loss.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ONE evening, late in the summer, the melancholy recluse, who might have forgotten, so seldom did he speak, the sound of his own voice, strolled out to evade the intensity of the heat in the hope of a breath of air from the river. But no, it lay like a sheet of glass, blank of incident—no breeze, no cloud, a pallid monotony of twilight. He had passed through the lawn and came out upon the levee which in the dead levels of that country seems of considerable elevation. He loitered along the summit, finding in the higher ground some amelioration of the motionless atmosphere, for it ceased to harass him, and with his heavy brooding thoughts for company he walked on and on, till at length he was aroused by the perception that in his absorption he had passed the limits of his own domain, and was trespassing on the precincts of a neighboring plantation. This fact was brought to his notice by seeing a bench on the levee which he had not caused to be placed there, and behind it was a mass of Cherokee rose hedge, the growth of which he did not approve on these protective embankments. On it were many waxy white blooms, closing with the waning day, amidst the glossy, deeply green foliage, and seated on the bench was a lady gowned in fleecy white.

He scarcely gave her a glance, and with a sense of intrusion he gravely lifted his hat as he was turn-

ing away. But she sprang up precipitately and came toward him.

"Oh, Randal, *Randal*," she exclaimed in a voice of poignant sympathy, and said no more. She had burst into a tempest of sobs and cries, and as he came toward her and held out his hand, he felt her tears raining down on it as she pressed it between both her soft palms.

"Oh, I know you don't—you *can't*—care for my sympathy," Hildegarde sobbed out brokenly. "It is nothing to you or to *him*, but Randal, he was not a man for *one* friend, one mourner. Everybody loved him that knew him."

She had collapsed in her former place on the bench, her arm over its back, her head bent upon it, her slender figure shaken by her sobs.

"But he would care for your sympathy, he would value your tears, shed for his sake," Randal said, suddenly. He walked to the bench and sat down beside her. "Only a few hours before—before—he was speaking to me of you. How lovely——"

He paused in embarrassment, remembering Adrian's protest how gladly he would see his brother make her the chatelaine of Duciehurst,—oh, dreams, dreams!—all shattered and gone!

"Did he—did he, really?"

She lifted her eyes, swimming with tears and irradiated with smiles, that seemed to shine in the dull twilight.

"Oh, how I treasure the words!" Then after a long pause—"I was afraid to speak to you, Randal. I do everything wrong!"

"You? You do everything right," he declared.

"I am all impulse, you know," she explained.

"Which is so much better than being all design," he interpolated.

"And so I speak without consideration, and might—might hurt people's feelings."

"Never—never in the world," he insisted.

"I am so glad you forgive it, if it is intrusiveness. But I am staying down here at my aunt's; she has been very ill. And I have so longed to say just one word to you—to call you by telephone—or,—something. I would see your solitary light burning across the lake, so late, so late—you know we have been watchers here, too,—and I would think of you, shut in with your sorrow, and no human pity can comfort you. So I could only send my prayers for you. Did you feel my prayers?"

They were very real to her in her simple faith, very important, necessarily efficacious.

"No," he said, honestly. But as her face fell he added: "Perhaps they will be answered."

"Oh, assuredly," she cried, tremulously, and her sincerity touched him.

"Whenever your light shines late from your east window remember that I am praying that you may have the grace to turn your thoughts joyfully to the blessed memories you have of your brother, and the happy hours that were in mercy vouchsafed to you, and what he was to you, and what you were to him, and what you will be to each other on the day of the great Reunion. So that you may have strength to take up your duties in life again, in usefulness and contentment—like the man you were born to be, and the man you are. Then shall my prayers be answered, and the memory of your brother will become a blessing, and not a blight."

There was some responsive chord in that manly heart of his vibrating strongly to this appeal. Only the next day, struggling with an averse distaste and wincing from the sights and sounds of the former routine, he went out to supervise the weighing of the cotton in the fields, now beginning to open with a fair promise. He felt strangely grateful for the hearty greetings of the laborers, and an humble appeal to right some little injustice only within his power made his hands seem strong, and renewed his sense of a duty in the world.

The next day, collapsing on his resolution, it was difficult to force himself to take out his fine horse and drive as of yore to the neighboring town, attending a meeting of the planters of the vicinity, all agog, always, on the subject of the operations of the levee board.

When Sunday came, with, oh, how faint a spirit, he took his downcast way to the little neighborhood church, built in a dense grove, full of shadows and the sentiment of holy peace, called St. John's in the Wilderness, and his broken and contrite heart seemed all poignantly lacerated anew and bleeding, and found no comfort. It had all the agony of renunciation to think of his brother—his own other self, his twin existence—as translated to that far, spiritual sphere, which we cannot realize, or formulate aught of its conditions. His brother, alive, well, strong, loving and beloved, fighting his way dauntlessly through inadequate resources and restrictions, making and building of his own inherent values a place for himself in the world—that vital presence quenched! That loyal, generous, gentle heart to beat never again. It was a thought to make

the senses reel. He wondered that reason did not fail before its contemplation. He felt his eyes grow hot and burn in their sockets, and only mechanically and from force of habit could he follow the service. Once, as his unseeing gaze turned restlessly from the chancel they fell upon Hildegarde, seated in her uncle's pew. Her eyes were downcast, her face was sweetly solemn. A sense of calm radiated from her expression, her look of aloofness from the world. There arose in his mind the thought of Adrian's faith in her genuine graces of character, which belittled even her charm and beauty, his wish that she might share the splendor of Ran's restoration to fortune, when it should come full-handed to them, that she might grace the high estate of the lady of Duciehurst—oh, poor Duciehurst! He could but look upon her with different eyes for the thought. It was as a bond between them.

He had regained his composure, grave and dejected—all unlike his former self—by the time the sermon was ended, and he waited for her at the door; together they walked silently to her uncle's home under the deep rich shadows of the primeval woods.

Even trifles are of moment in the stagnation of interest in a country neighborhood. Some vague rumor of the little incident that these two had been thus seen publicly together penetrated beyond the purview of the parishioners of St. John's in the Wilderness. The association of names came thus to the ears of Paula Floyd-Rosney, and urged her to an action which she had been contemplating, but had relegated to a future propitious opportunity. It forced precipitancy upon her. If she intended to

move at all time must be taken into account, and the untoward chance of interference with her plans. She was now indeed the arbiter of her own destiny, she told herself. Her suit for divorce had been abated by reason of the death of Floyd-Rosney, and she was in the enjoyment of one-half of his princely estate in Mississippi—where the right of dower has been annulled and a child's part substituted as the share of the wife—and also the “widow's third” in Tennessee, for he had died intestate. She was young, and her spirits rebounded with the prospect of the rehabilitation of her happiness. Her heart bore, it is true, some sorry scars which it would carry to the judgment day. But she could not feel, she could not even feign, grief for her husband's fate; she knew it was liberation for her and his child. She had donned, in deference to the urgency of Mrs. Majoribanks, a fashionable version of widow's weeds, and she had intended to allow the traditional time of mourning to expire before she made haste to gather the treasures of youth and love that she had so recklessly thrown away. She had not even regret for the disaster of Duciehurst. She regarded its destruction as the solution of a problem. She would not have wished to win in the lawsuit the estate she felt was morally and equitably the property of her former lover. It was delightful to her to be in the position to bestow, and not to receive. She was in case to make brave amends for her fickle desertion of Ran Ducie at the summons of wealth and splendor. She would go back to him a prize beyond computation—the woman he loved and had always loved, but endowed like a princess and looking like a queen. The expectation embellished her almost

out of recognition; her closest friends and casual guests—for she had returned to her own home, from which she had fled—could but exclaim as her beauty expanded. "How I loved him!" she would whisper to herself, and sometimes she wondered if those five dread years under the yoke were not heavy payment for the fortune she was bringing him. The consciousness of this great wealth made her the more confident, the more plausible in the letter she wrote him. Though she had feared supplantation, it was only because he might be in ignorance of her attitude toward him.

It took the form of a letter of condolence. She declared she yearned to express her deep sympathy for him, although she had felt he might not care to hear from her on account of her connection with the hand that struck the blow which had so sorely afflicted him. But she conjured him, by their love for each other, so precious in the days that were past, to forbear thinking of her in that wise. The villain who had gone had no hold on her heart. He had destroyed her life. She could confess to Randal now that every day of the years and every hour of the days had been one long penance for her faithless desertion of him, her casting away his precious heart, worth more than all the gold of Ophir. She had never regretted it but once, and that was always, and unceasingly. She was possessed, she supposed,—or rather, consider that she was so young, so unsophisticated, so blinded by the glare of wealth and dizzy with the specious wiles of the world. Oh, to live the old days over again! But he must not hate her—he must not associate her with the name as detestable to her as to him. He must remember,

instead, how sweet was the simple story of their love, and date his thoughts of her from its emotions. One thing she begged of him—let her hear from him, and soon.

In all her formulations of the possible result of this letter she never anticipated the event. She had been prepared for delay. Some little time he must have to decide upon his course, his phrases, complicated as the whole incident was with the memory of the murderous Floyd-Rosney. When by return mail she noted the large white missive, with her name in his well-remembered, decided, dashing chirography, her heart plunged, and for a moment she almost thought it had ceased to beat. Her hands trembled violently as she tore open the envelope. Within was her own letter and on the reverse side of the last sheet were penned these words:

"This letter should be in your own possession. The story to which you allude I read to the last page, and the book is closed."

## CHAPTER XXVII

As the months wore on into winter Randal Ducie, in the pursuance of the effort to rehabilitate his broken and maimed life, was often in Memphis. His old associates had an eager welcome for him, for his candid and genial nature was supplemented by a tireless energy and some special acumen and active experience in the line in which these endowments were now needed. The levee crisis was acute, and the planters were eager to formulate an adequate and practical defense against the encroachments of the river, with State or Federal aid, rather than have the Delta serve, as they claimed, as an experiment station for the Government. Cotton was their objective,—not science.

Sometimes a poignant pang smote the heart of the lonely man as some absorbed and eager acquaintance greeted him, from force of habit, with the old look of inquiry as to his identity, one of those who used formerly to ask inadvertently, "Is this you, or your brother?" eliciting in those happy days the delighted response "Of course, it is my brother."

Alas, how Randal wished now that it was his brother,—to be himself lying in that quiet grave to which he was sure their ill-fated resemblance had consigned Adrian in the flower of his youth, and that it was he who was here among these streets of busy men with many a long year of life before him.

"But you should thank God that you are privileged to suffer in his stead," Hildegarde would argue with him. "He would have had all this torture to endure if you had been the one called away."

Shortly after his arrival in Memphis he had gravitated to her father's house, where he often sat for hours in the library in the quiet atmosphere of the books, her face pensive, illumined by the flash and sparkle of the fire as she worked with dainty, deft fingers on a bit of embroidery. Informal visits these, and often other members of the family gathered around the hearth,—her father, talking levee-board, and the stage of the river, the price of cotton and the dangers of overproduction; her college-boy brother, a football expert, a famous half-back with the latest sensations of the gridiron on Thanksgiving-day; her mother, soft and sweet, with that frank look of Hildegarde in her duller eyes, for which Randal loved her. He found the only comfort he knew in this group. Once, however, the young girl's unthinking candor almost stunned him.

"Such an odd thing," she said one day when all were present; she was evidently coming from far reaches of her reverie; she had been carefully matching the skeins for the embroidered gentian blooming under the benison of her touch, and he had a fleeting thought that she might have rivaled nature had she compared them to the tint of her eyes. "I met Mrs. Floyd-Rosney yesterday at the Jennison reception, and she asked me such a strange question."

She paused, but he would not inquire, and the others, realizing the malapropos subject, could not sufficiently command their embarrassment. But

the transparent Hildegarde needed no urgency.

"Mrs. Floyd-Rosney asked me," she said, laying all the skeins together in her right hand while she looked up with bright interest, "if you had ever told me of the contents of the letter she wrote to you some months ago."

"And what did you answer?" asked Randal, breaking the awkward silence.

"Why, of course I told her that you had never mentioned the letter," replied Hildegarde, with a flash of surprise. "I told her the truth."

"You did! Why, you amaze me!" exclaimed Randal, with a touch of his old gayety, and with the laugh that rippled around the circle the incident passed.

Yet this incident put him on his guard. He had long since lost every trace of the sentiment he had once felt for this woman. From the moment he had received his rejection, years ago, he had realized that he had been mistaken from the first in her nature. With many men the contemplation of the magnitude of the temptation, the splendor of the opportunity as Floyd-Rosney's wife, might have served to condone in a degree her defection. Not so with Randal Ducie. He had a very honest self-respect. He had been trained at his mother's knee to reverence the high ideals of life. To him, Love was a sacred thing, Marriage was the ordinance of God, and a mercenary motive a profanation. He had been poignantly wounded in the disappointment, humiliated, in some sort, yet he looked upon the discovery that she was vulnerable to this specious lure of gain as an escape, and he set all the strong will of his stanchly endowed nature to recover from the

influence she had exerted in his life. Now, so long afterward, when he had not only reason to condemn and resent her part in his own past, but to detest the very sight of her, the sound of the name she bore, he could not imagine how she could be the victim of the obsession that she was aught to him but a hateful living lie, a presentment of avarice. He wondered at the persuasion of a woman, perceived by him only in this instance, but often noticed elsewhere by the observant in such matters, as to the unlimited power of her attractions. She can never believe no ember burns amidst the ashes of a former attachment, dulled by time perhaps, covered from sight, but smouldering still, and with fresh fuel ready to flame forth anew. He could not understand on what was based her conviction of the permanence of his attachment. On her true faith to bind them together till death?—it had been tested and found wanting. On her gifts of intellect?—the supposition was an absurdity; she was indubitably a bright and a cultivated woman, but Randal had been educated too definitely in the masculine American methods to think of sitting at the feet of any woman. On her beauty?—where was the traditional delicacy of the feminine perceptions! Did she imagine him a Turk at heart? Her beauty might attract—it could never hold. In the old days of his fond affection if she had been visited by some disfiguring, defacing affliction she would have been the same to him, equally dear, and but that she herself had stripped off the mask and proclaimed the disguise that had befooled him she would have been the lady of his heart, the cherished treasure of his life to the day of his death.

Now he could but wish that she would withhold her withering hand from such poor values as she and hers had left him in life. He did not understand her latest demonstration. But for Hildegarde's pellucid candor he might never have dreamed of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's covert interest in a proposition made to him by the senior partner of a firm of prominent jewelers, looking to the purchase of the diamond necklace found among the jewels at Duciehurst, now lying in a safety deposit vault. Ducie curtly refused to entertain an offer. Then he as curtly asked:

"But why should you think I would wish to sell it?"

Mr. Dazzle was visibly embarrassed, but still rational.

"The idea was suggested to me, as the stones are of great—well—ahem—considerable value, and you have no ladies in your family."

"Not at present," said Randal, stiffly.

"True—true; you might care to retain them if you should marry. But as they are so far beyond the pretensions of present-day ornaments, something more suitable—and—and your being extensively interested in cotton planting where money can be used to advantage—"

"And lost to disadvantage, too," said Ducie, grimly.

"True—true—but the diamonds being wholly unproductive—they are cut in the old style, too, which tends to reduce their value—"

"You wouldn't have an antique necklace with diamonds cut in the present style?"

"No—no; I was considering them as disassociated

from their setting, which is very rare of workmanship—that is—I thought—the idea was suggested to me”—Mr. Dazzle did not intend to imperil his soul by lying in anybody's interest—“the idea was suggested to me that perhaps you might care to sell.”

“Not at all. The necklace is reserved as a bridal gift,” said Ducie, precipitately.

“And a most magnificent one,” declared Mr. Dazzle, his face beaming with the enthusiasm befitting his vocation. “I hope you will give us the commission to clean and put the necklace in order, see to the clasp, which should be renewed, possibly, as a precaution against loss,—all those details. It will appear to twice the advantage that it did when I saw it at the time you and your brother had it appraised with a view to dividing the valuables found at Duciehurst.”

Ducie got rid of the man without further committing himself. Then in surprise he demanded of himself why he had said this thing, when nothing was further from his thoughts. In fact it had been thrown off on the spur of the moment, to be quit of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney's suspected interference in his affairs. She wear the revered Ducie heirlooms! He would work his fingers to the bone before the jewels should go on the market. And the offensive suggestion that something simpler, cheaper, in the manner of the present day, might suffice for his bridal gifts when he should be called upon to make them, in order that the difference might go to forwarding his business, and ease the struggle for meat and bread, was so characteristic of the Floyd-Rosney methods of considering the affairs of other people that Randal could but ascribe it to her. But why

had his ungoverned impulse broached the idea of a bridal present? he wondered. Her interest, her espionage in his most intimate personal concerns seemed sinister, and he would fain be rid of the very thought of her.

The reaction had been great when Paula had received back her crafty letter of condolence with the characteristic endorsement on the final page. Her pride was humiliated to the ground, and her heart pierced. She could not realize, she would not believe that he no longer loved her. She could but think that were not other considerations held paramount he would have flown to her arms. She became ingenious in constructing a mental status to justify his course on some other theory—any other theory—than a burned-out flame. He was in the thrall of public opinion, she argued. He fancied it would not sustain him in his devotion to the widow of the man who had murdered his brother. He was ready to sacrifice himself and her also that he might stand unchallenged by the world—the careless unnoting world, rolling on its own way, that would not know to-morrow a phase of the whole episode. What was a gossip's tongue clacking here and there in comparison with their long deferred happiness. How should a censorious frown or a raised eyebrow outweigh all that they were, all that they had been to each other—their human, pulsing hearts! If she could only have speech of him—yet no! She could not say of her own initiative what had been most difficult to intimate in writing. She must wait, and plan, and watch, and be as patient as she might.

Her spirits had worn low in the process. She had begun to feel the keen griefs of a martyr. Through

her love for this man, what had she not suffered? From the moment on the *Cherokee Rose* that she had seen his brother's face, so nearly a facsimile of his own, her old love for him reasserted itself and would not be denied. Had not Adrian been of the passengers of the packet, had not so keen and intense a reminder of the old days risen before her, life would have gone on as heretofore. She would have continued to adjust her moods to the exactions of her arbitrary husband, as she had been well content to do. No jealousy would have inflamed his causeless suspicions. He would have been still in his lordly enjoyment of his rich opportunities and Adrian Ducie alive and well. She had been pilloried before the public gaze; her child had been torn from her bosom; her husband had made his name, the name she bore, infamous with a revolting crime, and was dead in his sins; and the man for whose sake—nay for the sake of a mere sweet memory of a boyish worship, a tender reciprocation of a pure and ardent attachment—this coil of events was set in motion, writes that he has read the story to the end of the page, and the book is closed. Ah, no—Randal Ducie, there is somewhat more, reading between the lines, for your perusal, and the book may be re-opened. Her heart was full of reproach for him, and yet she believed that he loved her and secretly upbraided him that he did not love her more than the frown of the world,—that world to which she had in her fresh youth been glad to do homage on her bended knees, sacrificing him to it, and her plighted troth.

She was restless; she could not be still. She was out every day. More than once in her limousine she

caught sight of him on the sidewalk. She had fancied, she had feared he might not speak, but he raised his hat with a grave dignity and a look wholly devoid of consciousness, and she could hang no thread of a theory on the incident. Once he chanced to be strolling with Hildegarde Dean, and with the recollection of her fresh, smiling, girlish face Paula went home in a rage, as if she had received some bitter affront, as if her tenure on his affections precluded his exchange of a word with any other woman, the tender of a casual courtesy. Then it was that she projected the purchase of the necklace. If he should—but oh, he could not! That girl should not wear the gorgeous gewgaw, which she herself had rescued at such pains and risk, and restored to his possession. He was as poor as poverty—she had adopted her husband's habit of scorn of small means—and she would buy it secretly through an agent, at any price.

When the answer came from the jeweler she was stunned. It was reserved as a bridal gift, quotha. She had crystallized the very thought she had sought to preclude. The mischance tamed her. She caught her breath and took counsel with sober conservatism. She must be wary; she must make no false move. Indeed, she told herself she must be utterly quiescent; she must, in prudence, in self-respect, make no move at all. Then by degrees her persistent hopefulness, her vehement determination, were reasserted. She argued that no immediate bridal was foreshadowed, nor with whom. She herself might wear these jewels,—which she had discovered and restored,—on a day that would be like a first bridal,

for her wedding seemed to her now as a sacrifice to Moloch.

Some time later she chanced, while driving, to meet Hildegarde, walking alone. Paula joyously signaled to her and ordered the limousine to be drawn up to the curb. "Come with me," she said, genially, "let's have a long drive and a good talk. I was just thinking of you!"

She looked most attractive as she smiled at the girl. Her ermine furs, including the toque—for she had cast aside even the perfunctory weeds she had worn—added an especial richness and daintiness to a wintry toilette of black, adhering to the convention of second mourning, it being now almost a year since Floyd-Rosney had startled the world by his manner of quitting it. Her eyes were bright and kindly, her cheek delicately flushed. She had an increased authority or autocracy in her manner, which might have come about from unrestrained control of her fortune and her actions, but which seemed to the girl in some sort coercive. Hildegarde felt that she could scarcely have refused if she would, yet indeed she did not wish to decline, and soon they were skimming along the smooth curves of the speedway in the driving park, the river, though lower than at this season last year, glimpsed in burnished silver now and again through the trees.

"I have a good scheme for you and me, Hildegarde," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, and as the two sat together she slipped one hand into Hildegarde's chinchilla muff to give her little gloved fingers an affectionate pressure. "I want you to go with me as my guest to New Orleans for Mardi Gras,—doesn't Lent come early this year? The yacht is

quite ready and we will make a list of just a few friends for company. And afterward to my house on Saint Simon's Island."

"Oh, ideal," cried Hildegarde joyously. "I shall be delighted to go."

"I think Saint Simon's Island is the choice location for the penitential season," said Paula flippantly,—"savors least of sackcloth and ashes."

Hildegarde's face fell.

"Oh, did I tell you," the quick Paula broke off suddenly, "that as a Lenten offering I am going to furnish a room and endow a bed in the new Charity Hospital?"

"Oh, how lovely," cried Hildegarde, radiant once more.

"But to return to our outing," resumed Paula, "of course, under the circumstances," with a slanting glance at the presumably grief-stricken ermine and velvet, "I can't make up a party of pleasure for myself,—it must be complimentary to my dear young friend, and its personnel must be selected with that view." Once more her hand crept into Hildegarde's muff.

She paused reflectively for a moment, while her mood seemed to change, and when she went on it was in a different tone and with a crestfallen look.

"To be quite frank with you, dear, I have a strong personal interest in the occasion. I really want an excuse to get out of the town myself. There's a man here whom I want to avoid, and I'm forever meeting him."

"I wonder," commented the guileless girl.

"It is always easier to run away from a thing like that than to bring it to a crisis, and really in this in-

stance circumstances will not admit of any canvassing of the matter."

Hildegarde's face was eloquent of interest, but she decorously forbore inquiry.

"If I mention the name you won't repeat it, though I don't see why I should, but Heaven knows I am so lonely I long to confide my troubles to some sympathetic soul."

And now it was Hildegarde's hand that stole into the ermine muff with an ardent little clasp which was convulsively returned.

"You can say anything you wish to me, dear Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, and rely on my silence."

She turned such pellucidly clear azure eyes on Paula. She looked so docile and ingenuous, that for one moment the heart of the schemer almost misgave her. And indeed in the old days, before Paula ever met Floyd-Rosney, she would have been incapable of the duplicity which she now contemplated. But when sordid worldly motives are permitted to enter the soul of a woman and to dominate it they work its ultimate disintegration, despite the presence of worthier traits which otherwise might have proved cohesive. As, however, she spoke the name already on her lips she detected a quiver in the little hand she held, and that vague tremor served to renew her purpose and nerved her to go on. "It is Randal Ducie," she said.

For she had deliberately planned at whatever sacrifice of truth to implant distrust and aversion toward Randal Ducie in the mind of this girl of high ideals; to remove her for a time from the sphere of his influence and the opportunity of explanation; in the interval to supplant him in her estimation with

others of carefully vaunted attributes. By the time Hildegarde Dean should return from Saint Simon's Island she would not tolerate his presence, and in the humiliation of her contempt Randal Ducie might find a solace in recurring to the page of that sweet old story, albeit he had so hardly declared the book was closed.

"It is Randal Ducie," Paula repeated. "You know long ago,—is that front window closed?—these chauffeurs hear everything if one is not careful,—well, long ago when I was with my grandmother,—we lived at Ingleside, Ran Ducie and I were engaged. Did you know that?"

"I have heard it," said Hildegarde, her face tense and troubled, her eyes unseeing and dreamily fixed.

"You have heard, too, that I threw him over, having the opportunity to make a wealthy match."

"Ye-es," admitted Hildegarde, embarrassed, "people say anything, you know. They gossip so awfully."

"Well," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, looking out pathetically at the budding trees of the similitude of a forest as the car swung down the broad, smooth curves, "it was the other way about. It was *he* who changed his mind. Then I had the opportunity of the grand match, the first time I ever was in New Orleans—and I took it out of pique. A girl is such a poor, silly, little fool."

Hildegarde was silent. There was so strong an expression of negation, of condemnation, of doubt on her face that Paula went on precipitately.

"Of course, I wasn't in the least justified."

"And you realized that?" said Hildegarde.

"You see, I didn't love my husband. You don't

understand these things, child. He was kind, in his way, and rich, and talented, and handsome——”

“Oh, yes, he was splendid looking,” said Hildegarde, sustaining her pose of interest, but her lips were white.

“But I didn’t love him—and I loved Randal. A girl, though, Hildegarde, cannot remonstrate against inconstancy. Randal came to me and said he had mistaken the state of his feelings, that the interest he had felt for me was merely because we happened to be the only two young people in the neighborhood and were thrown together so often; that he realized this as soon as he was again in the world, and that it was foolish for him to think of taking a wife in view of his limited resources. He asked to be released. So there was nothing for me to say but ‘Good day, Sir,’ with what dignity I could muster,—for, my dear girl, ‘Good day’ had already been said by him. Oh, kind Heaven, why do women have such keen memories? It wasn’t yesterday, surely.”

Paula threw her face suddenly into its wonted pretty and placid and haughty contour, and bowed and smiled to a passing car, filled with bowing and smiling faces.

“I couldn’t help feeling a bit triumphant that such a notable catch as Mr. Floyd-Rosney—so cultivated, and talented, and wealthy—should single me out as his preference as soon as he saw me.”

“I think your feeling was very natural,” said Hildegarde, “but I don’t see why you should leave town on Randal Ducie’s account.”

What made her lips so dry, she wondered. They fumbled almost unintelligibly on the words.

“Oh, my dear, that isn’t the end of it. He is

all for taking it back now; for renewing the old romance. He has a thousand reasons for his defection, the chief being—and it was really true—that he couldn't afford to marry and was pushed to the wall by some debts that he had contrived to make. But, Hildegarde, the real fact is not the revival of his love for me—very warm it is now, if he is to be believed—but—you would never realize it, you are such an unworldly, uncalculating little kitten—but, I have at my disposal a great fortune, with nobody to say me nay. I am one of the largest taxpayers in the county, and that does make a man's heart so tender to his old love; the girl who adored him, who told him all her little, foolish heart, and let him kiss her good-by, always, and lied to her grandmother, and told the unsuspecting old lady she never did. Oh, why are women's memories weighted to bursting with trifles! Now, Hildegarde, haven't you noticed how much Ran Ducie has been in town all last fall and this spring?"

Hildegarde had, indeed, noticed it. She nodded assent. She was beyond speech.

"That's his errand, my dear, making up for lost time. Here we are at your home. Thank you so much for giving me the chance to go. I'll make it lovely for you. The yacht casts off at five to-morrow afternoon, and the limousine will call for you at four."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

HILDEGARDE passed a wakeful night of troubled thought. Only after the tardy dawn of the early spring was in the room did she fall into the dull slumber of exhaustion, from which she roused at last, unrefreshed and languid. Before she broke her fast she dispatched a note to Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, declining on second thoughts the invitation to make the trip to New Orleans and St. Simon's Island, which she had welcomed so enthusiastically when it was broached the previous day. She gave no reason for her change of mind, but expressed her thanks very prettily and courteously; the conventional, suave phrases exacted by decorum incongruous with the pale, stern, set face that bent above them. Her mother cried out in surprise and solicitude when she came into the library, with this mask, so to speak, alien to the joyous countenance she was wont to wear, so soft and glowing, so bland and gay, but she petulantly put aside all inquiries, declaring that she was quite well and only wanted to be left alone. To be quit of the family she escaped into the solitary sun-parlor, and sat there in a wicker chair among the palms, and watched the blooms in the window-boxes that illumined the space with their vivid glintings. For there was no sun to-day—a hazy, soft, gray day, and but for the gleam of her white dress in the leafy shadows Randal Ducie

might not have seen her there when he was ushered into the library; after somewhat perfunctory greetings to her father and mother he strode, with the freedom of an acknowledged friend of the family, through the room into the sun-parlor and sat down beside her.

She was wearing a house dress of white wool, sparsely trimmed with only a band of Persian embroidery about the sleeves and belt and around the neck, which was cut in a high square, showing her delicate throat. She looked up embarrassed as he came in, conscious that she had on no guimpe, and no lace on the sleeves, and murmured something about not being fit to be seen. But in his masculine inexperience he perceived no lack in point of the finish of her attire, though the change of her countenance instantly struck his attention.

"Oh, what has happened?" he cried, solicitously. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing at all," she replied, scarcely lifting her heavily lidded eyes. "I wish everybody would quit asking me that."

"I can see that something is troubling you dreadfully," he protested. "Won't you let me help you? I could brush it away with one hand."

"Oh, it's nothing," she declared, irritably.

For a few moments there was silence between them as he sat gazing at her pallid and listless face, with its downcast and dreary eyes, her languid, half-reclining attitude, her idle, nerveless hands clasped in her lap. The change in her was pathetic,—appealing.

"See here, Miss Dean, trust me; if you have stolen a horse, I will hide him for you."

An unwilling smile crept to the verge of her drooping lips, but she ejaculated impatiently:

“Oh, nonsense!”

“I don’t want to intrude on your confidence, but, —but”—with deep gravity and a lowered voice, “have you allowed yourself to become involved in some—conspiracy against the government?”

The unwelcome laugh had crept into her eyes as she lifted her heavy lids and glanced at him.

“Oh, you know I haven’t!”

Then the contending emotions were resolved into tears, and slowly and painfully they overflowed her sapphire eyes, coursing one by one down her white cheeks.

“I should not have spoken,” he said, contritely, “I only add to your distress. Forgive me. I’d better go.”

“No—no—don’t. But I can’t explain. I’ve promised—only this I know—I can’t *say how* I know, but I *know* that my best friend has told me a lie—a wicked, defamatory, deliberate lie—and I can’t forgive it.”

“Why should you forgive it?” he asked. “It is the limit, the unforgivable.”

There was a momentary pause. The tears welled up anew in the blue eyes and the white cheeks were all wet with them; however, she mopped them with her handkerchief rolled into a little ball for the purpose.

“It was such a cruel lie, deliberately planned, so circumstantial,” she sobbed, “so plausible, apparently confirmed by facts. I do believe it would have deceived anybody, everybody, but me. I can’t controvert it—the circumstances are out of my scope,

But I *know*—I know—I *know* of my own accord,—I can't say how,—but every breath I draw, every fiber in me is a witness of the truth—the eternal truth!"

She burst into a tempest of sobs, and Ducie was carried beyond bounds.

"Oh, you must not, you shall not, give yourself so much pain for this vile liar, whoever it is. Have some mercy on me, if not on yourself. I can't endure to see you so distressed—it breaks my heart. I have loved you too long, too devotedly——"

He paused abruptly; he had not intended to broach the subject thus, to put his fate to the touch while she was hardly herself, overwhelmed by the agony of some poignant, covert grief which he could not share. Surely this was not the moment to decide the course of his future life and hers. He had had his grave misgivings as to her preference. She was joyous and lovely, and sweet and congenial to many alike who basked in the radiance of her charm. She was the reigning belle of the winter, and doubtless her relatives entertained high ambitions as to her settlement in life. Since the loss of Duciehurst from his material hopes and prospects he had scarcely felt himself justified in asking her to share his restrictions and limited resources. He lived on the look in her eyes, a chance word among all the others, and he had not had hope enough, encouragement enough of her preference to urge his suit upon her. He felt as if he stood in an illumination of heaven and earth when she turned her face suddenly, and asked:

"How long?"

He had both her little hands in his when he strove to differentiate for her just when and how he first

recognized the unfolding of this flower of love to irradiate his life with bloom and fragrance and then to urge upon her some word of promise to set his plunging heart at rest.

Her face, all fluctuating with happy smiles and flushes, grew affectedly grave as she seemed to consider.

"I am not much like a parched flower," she said, "but I have been waiting some time for this dew-drop."

"Oh, if I had only known, how much I could have saved myself," exclaimed Randal, voicing the sentiment of many an accepted lover.

"I expected this—remark—of yours," she declared, her blue eyes archly glancing, "at the De Lille reception—'way back, 'way back in the Middle Ages, when you said in such an impassioned voice, 'Will you—will you have some more *frappé*?' "

Then they both laughed out joyously, and her father in the library, turning over the journal in his hand to get at the river news, had a vague realization of the instability of the moods of women and especially of girls, and was pleased that Hildegarde had recovered her equanimity since her tiff against Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, as he interpreted it, had induced her to forego her charming springtide outing.

The cruise, though somewhat delayed, that the party of guests might be selected anew and assembled, took place according to the plans of Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, at once the most discriminating and lavish of hostesses; but before the *Aglaia* weighed anchor the news of the engagement was sown broadcast in the town and it became the subject of conversation one day as the yacht steamed down the

Mississippi on her mission of pleasure. Mrs. Floyd-Rosney, whose experience and training had developed great powers of self-control, hearkened with special interest to the details of the gossip, and often commented characteristically. The bride-elect, it was surmised, would receive splendid presents, in view of her many wealthy relatives and friends and her great popularity, but none could compare with the necklace of Ducie diamonds, the gift of the groom, which it was said she would wear with her wedding dress of white satin.

"And how ridiculous for people of their limited means," cried Mrs. Floyd-Rosney. Her late husband himself could hardly have seemed more scornful of moderate circumstances.

"Except that the necklace is an heirloom," said Colonel Kenwynton.

"A man in love thinks nothing is *too* fine," suggested one of the ladies.

"Randal Ducie is not and never was in love with Hildegarde," said Mrs. Floyd-Rosney with an air of much discernment. "She is not of the type that would appeal to him; but she was very instant in bringing herself to his notice and diverting his mind, and taking him out of himself after his bereavement and so became a sort of consolatory habit."

"That is a beautiful idea," said Colonel Kenwynton warmly,—"to add to the blessed relation of a wife the sacred mission of a ministering angel."

This was not in the least what Mrs. Floyd-Rosney had intended to intimate, as was abundantly manifest by the thinly veiled anger and repugnance on her face, which was now beginning to have need of all the suavity and grace she could command. It

was growing perceptibly hard in these days, and its incipient angularities were more definitely asserted. There was a recurrent expression of bitter antagonism in her eyes that gave added emphasis to the satiric fleer in the occasional upward lift of her chin. People were already commenting on the strange deterioration in her beauty of late, and although Colonel Kenwynton was in no degree aware of the reason for her state of mind, he felt vaguely depressed by her look and manner.

He rose presently and strolled away from the group on the deck, smoking his cigar and scanning the weather signs of the coming evening. The stress of the subject of Randal Ducie's bereavement weighed heavily on his nerves in this vicinity. If, under all the circumstances, it could be so easily and openly mentioned here he was not sure of his ability to listen with discretion. The world was growing strange to him,—he felt himself indeed a survival. He did not understand such views as seemed to possess this woman, such standards of right, such induration of sensibilities. Man and soldier though he was, he could look only with glooming and averse eyes at the wreck of the *Cherokee Rose*, where a dread deed was wrought, lying white and stark, skeleton-wise, like bleaching bones on the sand-bar in that immaterial region between the pallid mists of the evening and the gray sheen of the river. Very melancholy the aspect of the forlorn craft, he thought in passing, and he scarcely wondered at the prevalence of the riverside legend that strange presences were wont to revisit the glimpses of the moon on this grim, storied wreck of the Mississippi.

He could not imagine how Mrs. Floyd-Rosney in

pursuit of pleasure could endure to pass this poignantly ghastly reminder, and still further down the stream to approach the site of Duciehurst under its swirling depths,—the packets now made a landing called by the name a mile to the rearward of the spot where the old mansion had stood. But presently the graceful yacht was steaming swiftly down this glamourous reach of the river, and beneath its gliding shadow in inconceivable depths lay this epitome of the past,—the demolished home altar, with its spent incense of domestic affection, the lost hopes, with their lure of tenuous illusions; the futile turmoils of grief; the transient elation of joy; the final climax of death,—all the constituent elements of human experience. Now they were naught, nullified, while the world swept on uncaring, typified by the swift yacht, leaving astern the site of oblivion.



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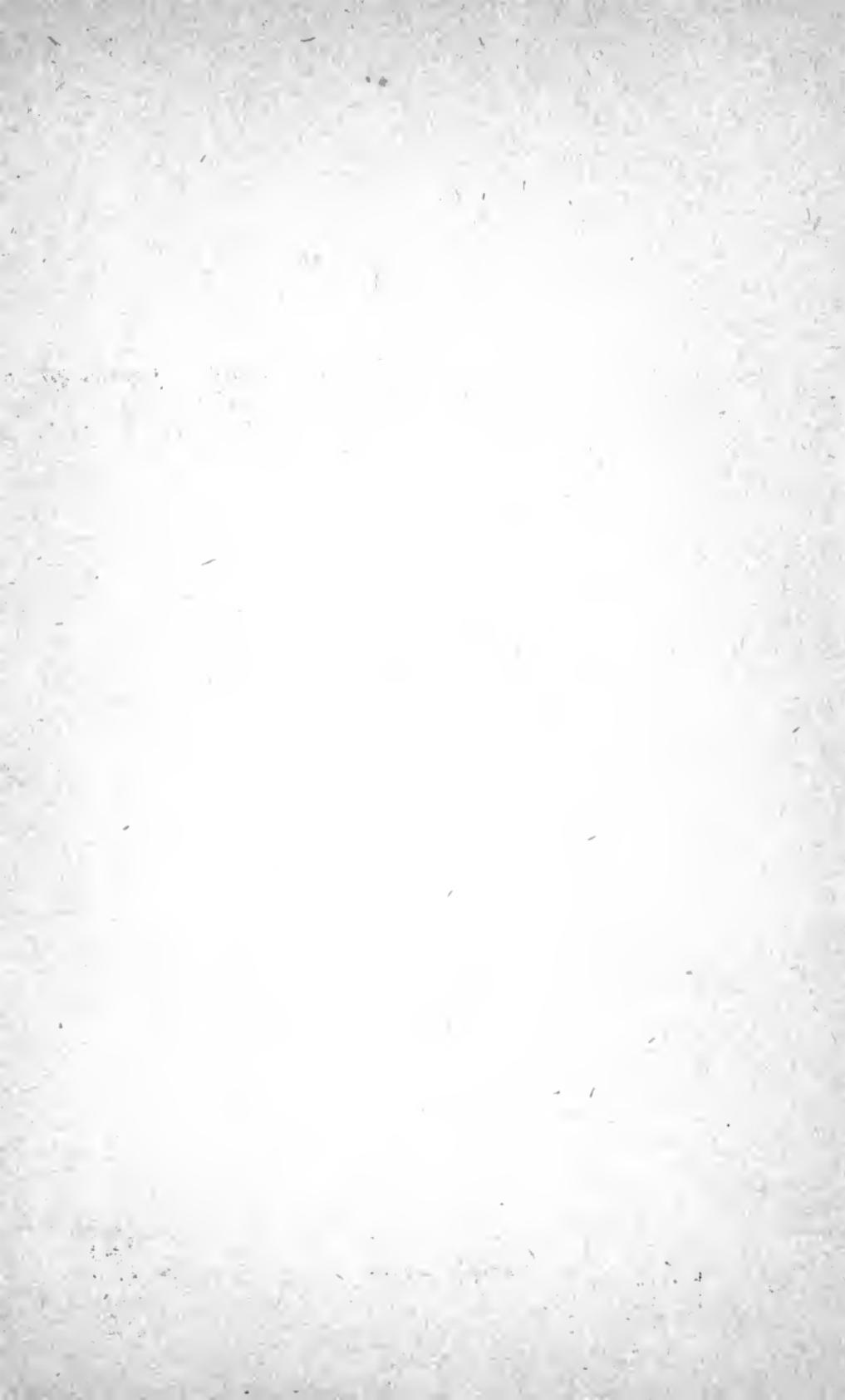
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